

THE REASONS MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

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In the dissertation, I explore a notion of practical deliberation that sits at the mean between two extremes: (a) reality does not favor any way of acting, and (b) reality requires us to adopt specific projects and values. To be specific, I motivate the following two theses from Lord (2018):

Possessed Reasons: What we ought to do is determined by our possessed reasons

Possession: What it is for agent A to possess reason R to φ provided by fact F is for A to be in a position to manifest knowledge about how to use R to φ .

I then defend the following thesis:

Management: An agent is rationally permitted, in some instances, to control which reasons she possesses by controlling whether she satisfies the conditions for their possession.

These three theses, taken together, constitute the Reasons Management Framework (RMF).

In the dissertation, I motivate and develop the implications of RMF. I make the case that RMF allows us to adopt a broadly realist view of normativity that is familiar to us: it (a) acknowledges the existence of objective reasons and values, but also (b) gives agents

flexibility in deciding which objective reasons and values will play a role in determining what they ought to do.

The dissertation is organized into four chapters. First, I prepare the way for RMF by defending normative realism against a recent anti-realist objection. Second, I motivate RMF and consider its implications. Third, I consider the objection that RMF allows for moral rationalization and reflect on the rational justification for reasons management broadly speaking. Finally, I apply RMF to the context of romantic love and the Trading Up Problem.

For Bertha and Victor

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PREFACE

This dissertation was written under rather difficult personal circumstances. A draft of the last chapter on love was written at a time when I was reflecting on romantic love both theoretically and in my personal life. After presenting the chapter in March 2018, I received news that my father had cancer. This sidelined me for months and its repercussions still affect my family at the time of writing. One year later, and rather ironically, I was working on a revise and resubmit for that chapter after going through a sudden though ultimately amicable breakup. By March, I had a solid draft of only the last chapter and a rough draft of chapter 2. Chapters 1 and 3 simply did not exist in any form and a full draft needed to be submitted by May 2019. By the grace of God, the support of my close friends, and the firm but gentle hand of my adviser, chapters 1, 2, and 3 were completed in a flurry of philosophical activity over the course of two months.

I aim to be a person that is grateful even in difficult circumstances. Though I often fail at it, I hope the present dissertation is an expression of the gratitude I have for all those who have helped me along the way.

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INTRODUCTION

When we think about what to do, we think that reality favors acting in certain ways. We can't just do whatever we want. For example, there is injustice, poverty, and suffering in the world. When we reflect on these facts, we take them to provide us with reasons to act. Something is amiss when we choose to ignore such facts or do nothing in response to them. Another way to put it is that such facts provide us with reasons to act that are relatively independent of our contingent interests, desires, and conceptual schemes.

At the same time, we're also drawn to the idea that *we* play a role in determining what we ought to do. If reality dictated all that we are to do, then it would seem that deliberation is purely a matter of discovery. Reality requires us to pursue certain personal projects, love certain people, or engage in certain intellectual pursuits. Such a picture of practical and theoretical deliberation seems alien to how we live. On this view, living rationally is like we're Super Mario trying to collect as many marked coins (reasons) we can. At the end of each stage (deliberation), we bunch up the marked coins (each mark representing a distinct action), weigh them, and take up the weightiest set (act accordance to the weightiest set of marked reasons).¹ Something seems amiss. Any account of practical deliberation must allow room for us to choose our own personal projects, romantic partners, and intellectual projects.

¹Thanks goes to Meghan Sullivan for the amusing example.

One might think that the only way to secure this freedom to pursue our own projects must involve some form of anti-realism. Williams seems to think this when he writes that “[a] radical form of freedom may be found in the fact that we cannot be forced by the world to accept one set of values rather than another.”² On the other hand, one might be tempted to think that this sort of freedom is a myth when confronted with normative reality (i.e. objective values and reasons). I get a sense of this when I read Singer’s (1972) *Famine, Affluence, and Morality* and recognize that not all of my personal projects are justifiable after all.³

The aim of the present dissertation is to explore a notion of practical deliberation that sits at the mean between these two extremes that also allows us to get clear on the relationship between reasons and our agency. To be specific, I will adopt a specific version of Perspectivism about rationality and practical deliberation from Lord (2018) which consists of two claims:⁴

Possessed Reasons: What we ought to do is determined by our possessed reasons.

Possession: What it is for agent A to possess reason R to φ provided by fact F is for A to be in a position to manifest knowledge about how to use R to φ .

I will argue that we should add a third thesis:

Management: An agent is rationally permitted, in some instances, to control which reasons she possesses by controlling whether she satisfies the conditions for their possession.

² Williams (1985, 141).

³ I discuss related issues in 2.4.

⁴ Possessed Reasons is found in Lord (2018, 223) and Possession in (ibid., 124).

These three theses, taken together, constitute the **Reasons Management Framework** (RMF). This dissertation motivates and develops the implications of RMF. I make the case that RMF allows us to adopt a broadly realist view of normativity that is familiar to us: it (a) acknowledges the existence of objective reasons, but also (b) gives agents flexibility in deciding which objective reasons and values will play a role in determining what they ought to do.

The dissertation is organized into four chapters. First, I prepare the way for RMF by defending normative realism against a recent anti-realist objection. Second, I motivate RMF and consider its implications. Third, I consider the objection that RMF allows for moral rationalization and reflect on the rational justification for reasons management broadly speaking. Finally, I apply RMF to the context of romantic love. Here are detailed summaries of each chapter.

In the first chapter “Defining the Presence of Value”, I take on an objection to the idea that reality favors certain ways of acting and thinking. We can start by considering the following:

Fact: We should seek peaceful solutions to civil wars while aiding innocent civilians, find long-term solutions to world poverty, and vote out racist and sexist presidents.

Fact fits comfortably within moral realism which consists of the following theses: moral sentences express moral beliefs, some of which are true, in virtue of moral facts which obtain because moral properties are instantiated. Said properties are generally independent of our contingent desires, beliefs, and conceptual schemes. Finally, practical deliberation is a

matter of figuring out and being guided by such mind and language independent moral facts.⁵

The task of the chapter is to articulate and respond to a new anti-realist challenge to moral realism (and normative realism generally) from Dasgupta and Clarke-Doane.⁶ The challenge takes inspiration from an old problem (i.e. the Open Question Argument/Hume's Law) and applies it to normativity in general.⁷

Explanatory Requirement: If property P should guide acting or theorizing, then there must be an explanation for why this is so.

No Explanation: There is no explanation for why property P should guide acting or theorizing.

Conclusion: Therefore, it is not the case that property P should guide acting or theorizing.

Using this argument schema, Dasgupta has argued that all properties (e.g. pleasure, pain, *sui generis* Moorean property P, truth, reference, eliteness, etc.) are subject to the same conclusion. There is no realist-friendly explanation for why any property is normative (i.e. it is such that we should theorize and act in accordance with it). Call this the *Absence of Value Problem* for moral (normative) realism.

I argue that the anti-realist's case for **No Explanation** rests on a faulty assumption about explanation. Once we realize that we can provide a real definition of normative

⁵ The characterization is drawn from Clarke-Doane (forthcoming b). See Enoch (2011) for discussion of deliberative indispensability.

⁶ While my concerns are with moral realism in particular, my response to the challenge is perfectly general and can be used to defend normative realism.

⁷ See Dasgupta (2017, 2018, manuscript). Clarke-Doane (forthcoming b, ch. 6) also raises similar worries.

property (i.e. what *it is* for a property *to be* normative), the realist has a plausible response to the anti-realist.

In section 1.1, I articulate and motivate this new anti-realist challenge. First, I point out that the realist should not reject **Explanatory Requirement**. The realist account of practical and theoretical deliberation presupposes that we can know what the normative properties are. Even if normative properties could be brutally normative (i.e. normative without explanation), it would be unclear how we could come to know what such properties were.⁸

Second, I consider the anti-realist case for **No Explanation**. The anti-realist's insight is to point out that standard solutions to the Open Question Argument (semantic/conceptual analyses) won't work by the realist's own lights. These solutions (McPherson and Dunaway (2016), Finlay (2014), etc.) implicitly or explicitly appeal to features of our mind or language, but realism tells us that normative properties are mind and language independent. Dasgupta (2018), Clarke-Doane (forthcoming b), and Eklund (2017) all point out that we could have had very different normative concepts (or concepts with very different extensions). Even if this couldn't be the case (e.g. properties aren't cheap or some are elite), the realist still owes us an explanation for why the properties that actually guide our theorizing and acting *should* do so. Dasgupta (manuscript, 24) then proposes that the realist must provide an explanation of the following form:

Regress Stopper: A property is normative if and only if (a) it is conferred normativity by another property or (b) is, by itself, normative.

⁸ Clarke-Doane makes this point in (forthcoming b, ch. 6).

Dasgupta thinks that the realist must eventually take option (b). Some properties just are brutally normative. But if this is true, then we can't know what such properties are. This is disastrous for realism.⁹

In section 1.2, I consider self-undermining charges (i.e. (1) the anti-realist attempts to provide a sound argument that soundness is not normative and (2) the anti-realist can't take her own explanatory questions against the realist seriously). Though sympathetic to these strategies, I point out that the anti-realist has plausible responses. The realist must do better.

In section 1.3, I propose a response to the *Absence of Value Problem*. Instead of trying to say what *makes* a property normative, the realist should provide a real definition of *what it is* for a property *to be* normative. For example, something is a university if and only if, and because, it is an accredited institution where students and faculty engage in certain social and academic activities. It makes no sense to ask what makes such an institution a university – that's just *what it is* for something to be a university. I argue that if a realist-friendly definition of normative property is possible, then the charge of primitivism is refutable. In the section, I first introduce Rosen (2015)'s notion of real definition, show how it can be used to reject **Regress Stopper**, and then show how the explanatory gap of the Open Question Argument remains because substantive real definitions will always feel “open” unlike semantic or conceptual analyses. I then consider the objection that an appeal to real definition is dialectically forbidden (i.e. why grant that real definitions should guide theorizing?). I point out that neither side can formulate an argument that is independent of the truth of their own

⁹ Though I briefly mention in section 1.1.4 that perhaps we are reliable in virtue of God or human nature.

view. The realist has to assume that real definitions should guide our theorizing while the anti-realist has to assume that they can't.

In section 1.4, I argue that the realist has an advantage. A thoroughgoing anti-realist who rejects the appeal to real definitions is in serious trouble. Such an anti-realist will have to be skeptical about philosophical discourse in general and will be committed to claiming that donating is normatively on a par with pillaging once we step outside of our contingent language games. I end on a conciliatory note. The anti-realist could be right that normativity is not completely mind and language independent. This leaves room for real definitions of certain normative properties that will appeal to facts about agents (e.g. their information states, their will, their personal projects, etc.).

Chapter 2 “The Reasons Management Framework” is the heart of the dissertation. I explore how a broadly realist view can accommodate the idea that we still have significant control over what we ought to do. I take this to be the intuitive starting point for practical reasoning. Reality serves as an important guide for what we are to do – there are objective values and reasons that we should abide by in deliberation. At the same time, we are beings with finite capacities and resources to respond to objective values and reasons. We are permitted to direct our finite capacities and resources at some objective values and reasons rather than others.

This chapter motivates a perspectivist theory of rationality and practical deliberation on which what one ought to do is a function of the reasons she possesses. I then show how this perspectivist theory can capture the intuitive starting point just mentioned while providing us with an illuminating account of our normative powers.

Section 2.1 motivates two theses from Lord (2018):

Possessed Reasons: What you ought to do is determined by the reasons you possess.

Possession: What it is for agent A to possess reason R to φ provided by fact F is for A to be in a position to manifest knowledge about how to use R to φ .

Possessed Reasons is motivated by the thought that if a set of reasons is to determine what one ought to do, then it must be the case that one is able to act in a credit-worthy manner on the basis of those reasons. **Possession** is motivated by similar thoughts. In order for an agent to possess some fact F as a reason, F must be able to play a role in her deliberation as the reason that it is. This requires that the agent has appropriate epistemic access to the reason and the practical ability to use it in her reasoning as a reason.

Section 2.2 examines the repercussions of **Possession**. If there are epistemic and practical conditions on reasons possession, and what we ought to do is determined by the reasons we possess, then can we control what we ought to do by controlling the reasons we possess? The answer, I argue, is yes. Insofar as we have latitude in terms of what to investigate, what to pay attention to, and what specific affective and reasoning capacities to develop, we can permissibly control what we ought to do by controlling the practical and epistemic conditions under which we possess reasons. Thus, I argue that the following is true:

Management: An agent is rationally permitted, in some instances, to control which reasons she possesses by controlling whether she satisfies the conditions for their possession.

I sketch out what this kind of control would look depending on the practical and epistemic conditions posited and then provide several examples of this kind of control.

The **Reasons Management Framework** (RMF) is the conjunction of **Possessed Reasons, Possession, and Management**.

Sections 2.3 and 2.4 puts RMF to work. I argue that we can understand will-based reasons and the distinction between the justifying and requiring strength of reasons as upshots of the account of normative powers implicit in RMF. In section 2.3, I argue that Chang's (2014, 2017) reliance on parity and the claim that will-based reasons can only be created in cases of parity has significant drawbacks. It involves a controversial thesis about value relations, misdiagnoses what makes hard choices hard, and sets arbitrary restrictions on when the will can create will-based reasons. I then point out that an appeal to RMF can make sense of will-based reasons insofar as we can control which reasons we possess.

In section 2.4, I argue that we can use RMF to understand Gert's (2004) distinction between the justifying and requiring strength of reasons. Instead of adopting a dualist theory of reasons weight (i.e. where reasons have two different kinds of weight), I argue that we can keep what is intuitively attractive about the requiring/justifying strength distinction while maintaining a monist theory of reasons weight. I show how a notion of requiring strength can be understood as restrictions on what reasons we ought to possess. I also point out that this approach can make sense of puzzling cases where an agent engaged in a superogatory action is nonetheless required to do the best among the superogatory actions available.

In chapter 3 "A Response to the Knave: Communal Practical Reasoning", I consider the objection that RMF not only allows agents to manage reasons related to their personal pursuits, it also allows agents to manage their moral reasons in ways that are intuitively reprehensible. I am both optimistic and pessimistic. First, the pessimism. I don't think that an individual who avoids possessing moral reasons must be substantively irrational (i.e. failing to respond to possessed reasons). Second, the optimism. While a knave can rationally choose to be immoral, RMF reminds us that we also have power over what knaves ought to do.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In section 3.1, I set up the problem for RMF by considering several cases. In particular, I introduce two characters who engage in reasons management: Knave and Lover. The challenge is simple: if Lover is rationally permitted to manage her reasons in favor of her beloved (a paradigmatic case of reasons management in a non-moral case), then why can't the Knave manage her reasons to avoid possessing moral reasons to help others or to be sympathetic? If the defender of RMF thinks there is a rational difference between Knave and Lover, then she should provide an explanation.

Section 3.2 is pessimistic. I consider several strategies that would impugn Knave with irrationality without also doing the same for Lover. I express skepticism towards such strategies. The result is that there is no deep asymmetry between Knave and Lover. Reasons management is subject to rational scrutiny in the moral and the non-moral case.

In sections 3.3 and 3.4, I express optimism. The pessimistic result is only problematic if we continue to think of practical deliberators as independently trying to possess and respond to reasons. Things change if we start thinking communally. In section 3.3, I point out that if **Management** tells us that we can control what we ought to do by controlling the reasons we possess, then the same control may be extended over the reasons *others* possess. If Knave fails to possess moral reasons, then *we* can provide her with them. The best response to Knave is to help her satisfy the epistemic and practical possession conditions for moral reasons rather than to impugn her with irrationality. I then consider some upshots of this proposal.

In section 3.4, I address the objection that if RMF does not posit a deep asymmetry between Knave and Lover, then it should also be the case that there is no deep asymmetry between our providing moral reasons to knaves and providing non-moral reasons to lovers. My response: guilty as charged. This is as it should be. We are rationally permitted to manage

our reasons insofar as it constitutes a good way of responding to normative reality. Any view that respects objective values and reasons must point out that there are limits to reasons management – limits that others can remind us of when they provide us with reasons that we've failed to consider.

In chapter 4 “Love and Rationality: The Experience-Commitment Account”, I focus on a puzzle concerning romantic love that RMF is uniquely poised to solve. The puzzle is generated when we accept the following three theses:

The Quality View: The loveable qualities of a beloved are weighty reasons for loving him.

Rationality: If an agent is choosing between any two attitudes or actions A and B, it is rational for an agent to choose attitude or action A only if she does not possess more/weightier reason to choose B.

Basic Possession: What it is for agent A to possess reason R to have attitude φ provided by fact F is for A to know F and for R to be a reason to φ .

Given these theses, it seems that every time we meet someone who has better qualities than our current beloveds, it seems that we are required to trade up. This is the Trading Up Problem.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a solution to this problem that tells us that we are not required to trade up in every such case. Furthermore, the solution should (a) respect our actual romantic practice and (b) provide both the abused and their supporters with plausible advice for leaving toxic or co-dependent relationships. The solution has two parts. First, **Basic Possession** is false. Possessing the qualities of a beloved requires actually experiencing them for yourself. Second, lovers manage their reasons. In committing to their beloveds, they ensure that they continue to possess most reason to love their beloveds by

continuing to experience their beloveds' qualities and refraining from experiencing the qualities of others.

The chapter is organized as follows. In section 4.1, I give a general characterization of romantic love and consider current solutions in the literature to the Trading Up Problem. I consider and argue against love non-rationalism – that there are no reasons for love. I then consider the view that love's reasons are permissive rather than requiring. While this view is systematic, and provides a promising solution to the problem, I point out in section 4.2 that it depends on a contentious dualist theory of reasons weight that makes bad predictions in the case of abuse. However, these views highlight an important insight. We have to think more seriously about when reasons must play a role in our deliberation in determining what to do. I then consider relationship-based accounts of love's reasons (ones on which the presence of a relationship is either an independent reason for love or a necessary condition for the existence of reasons for love). Though these accounts also face problems when we consider nascent love as well as cases of abuse, they are on the right track: we need to think harder about what it takes to possess a reason for love.

In section 4.2, I propose my Experience-Commitment Account. First, I argue against

Basic Possession in favor of **Possession**:

Possession: What it is for agent A to possess reason R to φ provided by fact F is for A to be in a position to manifest knowledge about how to use R to φ .

I then point out that if **Possession** is correct, then what it takes to possess a quality of a person as a reason to love them requires more than just knowing about said quality. It requires that you actually experience this quality for yourself (just as you are required to experience a painting in order to be able to appreciate it). Casually acquainting yourself with

someone or finding someone on Tinder will not lead you to have to trade up. However, a nearby worry remains. This is the *experience* part of the Experience-Commitment Account.

What about all of the wonderful people that we do happen to get to know (if we're lucky)? Would meeting such people mean that we are required to trade up? No. That is because there is also a *commitment* part to the Experience-Commitment Account. As an application of RMF, I point out that lovers manage their reasons in favor of their beloveds. They continue to seek intimate interactions with their beloved while refusing to do so with others. In doing so, they ensure that they continue to possess most reason to love their beloveds.

In section 4.3, I consider the advantages of my account and address an important objection. First, I argue that my account is preferable over an account that makes love's reasons permissive. I point out that such an account is theoretically less simple and makes bad predictions about cases of abusive or co-dependent love. I then address the objection that my view respects the letter but not the spirit of **Rationality**. On this objection, my view says that it's important to do what you have most reason to do but then says it's okay to not seek out reasons that you know are available. Though my account does say that it's sometimes okay not to seek additional reason that you know are available, I point out that this is as it should be. This is because given our cognitive and emotional limitations, our actual commitments to our spouses, and the opportunity costs that are involved in getting to know others intimately, we often have decisive reason not to seek out additional reasons. Next, I distinguish my account from Jollimore's (2011). I argue that my understanding of the commitment typical of love promotes a healthier and more confident love life than Jollimore's does. Lastly, I consider some additional advantages of my account over other solutions in the literature.

Finally, I consider remaining objections in section 4.4. First, I consider whether my account involves a form of bootstrapping. It does, but I point out that this is not a problem. Second, I consider milder cases where, despite how we've managed our reasons, we come to experience someone who may be slightly better than our beloveds. I point out that in most cases, we have relationship-based reasons for love. Absent these reasons, it may still be the case that our possessed reasons still favor loving our beloveds on the assumption of two plausible these concerning reasons possession. Third, I consider whether my account, like Mike Pence, advises you to avoid dinners with other people. It does not. Fourth, I consider whether my account rules out polyamory. It does not. Finally, I consider whether my account privileges certain sensory modalities or makes love at a distance impossible. It does not.

Note to the reader: The present dissertation is meant to be an integrated project, but the chapters of the dissertation were written in a modular fashion. Chapter 1 can be read on its own as a defense of moral realism against a recent anti-realist challenge. If you are primarily interested in RMF, you can read chapters 2 and 3 and skip chapters 1 and 4. If you are primarily interested in the Trading Up Problem, you can directly read chapter 4 which is self-contained. Nonetheless, the chapter does depend on claims made in chapters 2 and 3. I've provided footnotes and other indications pointing back to the relevant parts of chapters 2 and 3 for the reader's benefit.

CHAPTER 1:
DEFINING THE PRESENCE OF VALUE

At the time of writing, innocent civilians are caught between protracted civil wars in Yemen and Syria. At least fifty percent of the world's population lives on less than \$2.50 a day.¹⁰ The President of the United States has enacted racist and sexist policies while flouting the norms of office. Consider the following:

Fact: We should seek peaceful solutions to civil wars while aiding innocent civilians, find long-term solutions to world poverty, and vote out racist and sexist presidents.

Fact seems to be objective: it is true even if we (either individually or as a society) have no interest or desire to preserve peace, alleviate poverty, or combat racism and sexism. **Fact** also seems to provide practical guidance. Finally, practical deliberation is a matter of grasping such facts and properly responding to them in one's acting and thinking.

Moral realism makes good sense of this. Broadly characterized, moral realism consists of the following theses: moral sentences express moral beliefs, some of which are true, in virtue of moral facts which obtain because moral properties are instantiated. Said properties are generally independent of our contingent desires, beliefs, and conceptual schemes. Finally, practical deliberation is a matter of figuring out and being guided by such

¹⁰ See <https://www.dosomething.org/us/facts/11-facts-about-global-poverty>.

mind and language independent moral facts. Moral realism gives us a characterization of these facts with the tools of metaphysics, epistemology, and the philosophy of language.¹¹

Moral realism has been on a roll in the past two decades. Naturalist realists have used reference magnetism to resolve moral twin earth problems.¹² Non-naturalist realists appeal to essences to explain how moral properties supervene on, but are distinct from, natural properties.¹³ There is also optimism about the possibility of reliable moral knowledge. Either (a) the epistemic principles used to generate reliability worries are suspect, or (b) there are plausible accounts of how the moral facts are explanatorily connected to our beliefs about them.¹⁴

Despite these successes, the anti-realists are ready to fight back. The purpose of this paper is to articulate and respond to a new anti-realist challenge to moral realism (and normative realism generally) from Dasgupta and Clarke-Doane.¹⁵ The challenge takes inspiration from an old problem (i.e. the Open Question Argument/Hume's Law) and applies it to normativity in general. The challenge can be put succinctly: even if moral realism (normative realism more generally) is true, it cannot live up to its motivations. The realist understanding of practical and theoretical deliberation presupposes that we can figure out which properties are normative (i.e. which properties are the ones we should act and theorize

¹¹ The characterization is drawn from Clarke-Doane (forthcoming b).

¹² See Dunaway and McPherson (2016).

¹³ See Leary (2017).

¹⁴ For (a), see Clarke-Doane (2014) and for (b), see Dunaway and McPherson (2016), Bengson (2015), and Audi (forthcoming).

¹⁵ While my concerns are with moral realism in particular, my response to the challenge is perfectly general and can be used to defend normative realism.

in accordance with) so that we can act and theorize in accordance with them.¹⁶¹⁷ The anti-realist argues that there are no plausible realist explanations as to why we should act and theorize in accordance with any property (e.g. pain, happiness, truth, *sui generis* Moorean property P, essence, etc.). Instead, the realist is committed to primitivism: there just are intrinsically normative properties – properties that are normative all on their own without any explanation. Without such an explanation, even if there were such properties, we would never be able to figure out what they were. Thus, practical and theoretical deliberation, as the realist conceives of it, is impossible.

I argue that the anti-realist’s case for **No Explanation** rests on a faulty assumption about explanation. Once we realize that we can provide a real definition of normative property (i.e. what *it is* for a property *to be* normative), the realist has a plausible response to the anti-realist.

The paper proceeds as follows. In section 1.1, I articulate and motivate the anti-realist challenge and show why it is novel and concerning for the realist. In particular, I show why it demands a solution that goes beyond existing solutions to the Open Question Argument. In section 1.2, I consider two indirect strategies for rejecting the challenge that appeal to self-undermining worries. I suggest the moral realist can do better. In section 1.3, I propose a response to the challenge. If the anti-realist challenge amounts to a demand for an

¹⁶ Enoch (2011) calls this “deliberative indispensability.” Note: the realist need not be committed to the further claim that the truth of deliberative indispensability gives us epistemic justification for believing that there are normative facts or properties.

¹⁷ The mention of normative properties usually brings to mind *goodness*, *rightness* etc. Another way to put the point is that the anti-realist is challenging whether any property is normative in upshot (i.e. it is a property that we should act and theorize in accordance with). For example, it is commonly thought that truth is normative in upshot. We should theorize in accordance with it insofar as we should seek to discover what is true and believe it when we do.

explanation as to why certain properties matter for acting and theorizing, then what the realist should do is to deliver it in the form of a real definition of *what it is* for a property *to be* normative. The anti-realist has provided no independent argument against the possibility of a realist-friendly real definition of normative property. Thus, she is not entitled to claim that there is no explanation for why any property is normative. However, the anti-realist challenge presents an important lesson to the realist. The realist should not settle for conceptual or semantic analyses alone. Nor can she say that certain properties matter for acting and theorizing just because we actually act and theorize with them. Any realist-friendly real definition of normative property must avoid these pitfalls. I also consider the objection that an appeal to real definition is dialectically forbidden (i.e. why grant that real definitions should guide theorizing?). I point out that neither side can formulate an argument that is independent of the truth of their own view. The realist has to assume that real definitions should guide our theorizing while the anti-realist has to assume that they can't.

In section 1.4, I argue that the realist has an advantage by setting up a dilemma for the anti-realist. I propose a real definition of what it is for some property to be normative that should be appealing to the anti-realist. If she accepts it, she must drop her primitivist charge against the realist. However, if she rejects the possibility of real definition, she is in serious trouble. Such an anti-realist will have to be skeptical about philosophical discourse in general and will be committed to claiming that donating is normatively on a par with pillaging once we step outside of our contingent language games. I end on a conciliatory note. The anti-realist could be right that normativity is not completely mind and language independent. This leaves room for real definitions of certain normative properties that will appeal to facts about agents (e.g. their information states, their will, their personal projects, etc.).

1.1 The Anti-Realist Challenge

The recent anti-realist challenge to moral realism is refreshingly simple but it takes philosophical spade work to see why it is novel. The anti-realist does not purport to show that moral realism is false. Instead, she has two aims. First, she aims to show that the moral realist has no way of explaining why we should act and theorize in accordance with any particular property. Second, she aims to show that because the moral realist can't explain why we should act and theorize in accordance with any particular property, even if moral realism is true and there are such properties, they will never settle practical questions about what to do.

1.1.1 The Absence of Value Problem

To see how the anti-realist tries to establish the first aim, consider Dasgupta's (2017) argument against non-naturalist moral realism.¹⁸

- (1) If *sui generis* Moorean property P should guide action, then there must be an explanation for why this is so.
- (2) There is no explanation for why *sui generis* Moorean property P should guide acting and theorizing.
- (3) Therefore, it is not the case that *sui generis* Moorean property P should guide action.

Dasgupta has pointed out in subsequent work (2018, manuscript) that the above argument can be generalized. For any property that the realist thinks should guide acting and theorizing, Dasgupta claims the following argument will apply:¹⁹

¹⁸ Dasgupta (2017) calls this the external construal of the normative argument against non-naturalism.

¹⁹ See Dasgupta (2017, section 3), and Dasgupta (2018, 289).

Explanatory Requirement: If property P should guide acting or theorizing, then there must be an explanation for why this is so.

No Explanation: There is no explanation for why property P should guide acting or theorizing.

Conclusion: Therefore, it is not the case that property P should guide acting or theorizing.

Using this argument schema, Dasgupta has argued that semantic or metaphysical properties (e.g. truth, reference, eliteness, modality etc.) are subject to the same conclusion.²⁰

What should we think of this argument? Since the argument is valid, the realist must refute at least one of the premises. One might think that the first thing to do is reject **Explanatory Requirement**. Perhaps, contrary to some versions of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, there are brute facts about what properties should guide acting and theorizing. One lesson taken from Moore (1925) is that we should treat knowledge of the external world as explanatorily basic. Or at the very least, we should be more confident in the existence of an external world than we are of any thesis about knowledge that would threaten to rule out knowledge of the external world. Not only am I sympathetic to this point, so is Dasgupta (2017). He has proposed that perhaps in the case of pain, all the explanation we need is to feel it. In other words, the phenomenal nature of pain either fully explains why it should guide action or it obviates the need for such explanation.

Nonetheless, I suspect many philosophers are willing to grant **Explanatory Requirement** to Dasgupta. First, while we may have piecemeal knowledge as to which properties should guide theorizing and acting, many realists (just like most epistemologists

²⁰ Clarke-Doane (forthcoming a) raises similar worries for modal objectivity.

who want to provide a systematic theory of knowledge) would rather have a general explanation for why any property should guide theorizing and acting rather than not. Second, while the case for pain may be obvious, the same can't be said for other properties.²¹ For example, metaphysicians who appeal to notions such as metaphysical structure, eliteness, grounding, and essence should seek an explanation for why such properties should guide our theorizing as it is far less obvious why they should. The same might be said for philosophers generally who take truth and other semantic properties such as reference seriously for the purposes of theorizing. Finally, suppose **Explanatory Requirement** is false and some properties really are normative even if we can't explain why this is so.²² This should be cold comfort for the realist. As noted in the introduction, the realist's account of practical and theoretical deliberation presupposes that we can figure out what the normative properties are. If properties are normative without explanation, it's unclear how we can come to pick them out.²³

Granting **Explanatory Requirement** (or at least the realist project requires that such explanations are possible) why should the realist think that **No Explanation** is true? Dasgupta's reasoning is not entirely new. The demand for explanation and the denial of any

²¹ Even the case of pain is far from obvious. At least in some cases of physical exercise or competition, it's arguably the case that we shouldn't avoid pain.

²² Dasgupta (2018) actually concedes this point.

²³ I suppose a realist could deny that primitivism would entail that we can't know which properties are normative. Perhaps primitivism is true of material composition, but we still have reliable knowledge about what medium-sized dry goods exist. This idea is worth exploring, but I won't do it here except briefly in section 1.4.1 in which I note that perhaps God or human nature guarantees that we reliably track the normative properties even if we can't know that we are reliable. Furthermore, I suspect that such a view isn't satisfying either to realists or anti-realists. The anti-realist can easily point out that while there is widespread agreement as to what medium-sized dry goods exists, things are far less clear when we think about claims about which properties should guide our theorizing and acting.

possible explanation is inspired by Moore's (1903) Open Question Argument.²⁴ Though there are various ways of sketching out the argument, they all contain the following insight.²⁵ For any candidate identification or analysis of a normative concept with a non-normative concept, disputants who possess the relevant concepts can still continue to question its plausibility – this explanatory gap is what leaves the question “open”. The fact that such disputants can question the plausibility of the identification is taken as positive evidence that any identification or analysis will fail.²⁶ Case in point, try identifying goodness with pleasure. It still seems coherent for one to ask whether pleasure is good.

There are several standard responses to the Open Question Argument.²⁷ First, Finlay (2014), as a self-professed analytic naturalist, has pointed out that if there is a true conceptual analysis, then this very truth predicts why most analyses will feel open: they're false. What Finlay tries to do is muster an impressive array of linguistic data to convincingly defend a broadly Humean end-relational theory of normative terms.

Second, many non-analytic naturalists have appealed to semantic externalism to point out that though conceptual analyses (or identifications) of normative concepts in terms of natural concepts may be opaque to competent users of said concepts, these concepts may still mean the same thing in virtue of referring to the same property. The relevant property identities are synthetic *a posteriori*. Cornell Realists have made the point that our use of

²⁴ Found in Moore (1966).

²⁵ See van Roojen (2015) and Mehta (forthcoming) for discussion.

²⁶ Of course, Moore used this to argue for non-naturalist realism while non-cognitivists took the same point as positive evidence for their claim that normative language is non-referential and normative thought is non-cognitive.

²⁷ See van Roojen (2018) for further discussion of other solutions to the Open Question Argument.

normative terms such as goodness is externally regulated by natural properties just as our use of pre-theoretic terms such as water is externally regulated by H₂O. An updated version of this approach by McPherson and Dunaway (2017) appeals to reference magnetism and metaphysically elite properties to narrow reference in ways that would block moral twin-earth arguments.²⁸

In short, we could answer the Open Question Argument by either providing (i) a true conceptual analysis that would close the question or (ii) an *a posteriori* identification of the relevant properties that competent users of the relevant concepts may fail to grasp.

1.1.2 Why Existing Solutions to the Open Question Argument Won't Work

Given these standard responses, what has Dasgupta brought that is new to the table? Two things. First, the argument is perfectly general. Moral realists have focused their efforts on properties such as *goodness*, *rightness*, or *authoritative oughtness*. Perhaps such properties are causally regulated by natural properties. However, think about properties such as *eliteness* or *truth*. It's unclear as to how one would establish that we should theorize in accordance with such properties by appealing to causal regulation by natural properties or conceptual analysis.²⁹

²⁸ Here's a general version of the argument. (1) If semantic externalism about normative terms is true, then it's possible for alternative communities that have the same normative concepts as we do but those concepts refer to different properties. (2) If our normative concepts refer to different properties, then we do not mean the same thing by their use. (3) If we don't mean the same thing by their use, then we can't disagree. (4) We can intuitively disagree. (5) Semantic externalism about normative terms is false. McPherson and Dunaway deny (1) by appealing to reference magnetism and eliteness. There are elite normative properties that serve as reference magnets such that normative concepts will tend to refer to such properties.

²⁹ Recently, Copp (forthcoming) has proposed a third solution. He proposes that in order to possess normative concepts, we must adopt their inferential role. But when this is the case, we develop a bias against any putative extension. For example, when we judge that we ought to do something, we are committing ourselves to being blamed for not doing it. We avoid any putative extensions for our normative concepts because we want to avoid blame when we fail to act in accordance with the identified property. The proposal is neat, but it won't help for our present purposes. First, even if we provide an error theory for our open question

Second, and more importantly, Dasgupta is reminding the realist that any attempted explanation must meet certain desiderata. Unfortunately, existing standard solutions to the Open Question Argument don't seem to meet them. Recall that the realist thinks that normative properties are mind and language independent. Any explanation for why a particular property should guide theorizing or acting must not appeal to linguistic facts or facts about our mental states. Furthermore, the explanation has to be an answer to *why should we* rather than *why do we* act and think in accordance to certain properties. Stating that a particular property should guide theorizing or acting just because it does is just rejecting **Explanatory Requirement**. Also, for all we know, we could have theorized and acted in accordance with some other property. Even if we couldn't, that's still no explanation for why the properties that we actually theorize and act with are normatively special in the sense the realist seems to require. For the sake of future reference, we can label these realist demands on explanation as follows:

Independence: must be mind-language independent.

Real Explanation: cannot simply state that we *do* theorize and act in accordance with the putative property.

What Dasgupta proceeds to do in (2017, 2018) is to argue that standard solutions to the Open Question Argument fail to satisfy these desiderata. The main strategy is to point out that concepts and properties are cheap. There are many alternative normative concepts or alternative properties picked out by those concepts. The realist has not provided, and can't provide, an explanation for why only some of these concepts or properties are

intuitions, the anti-realist still wants an explanation for why the property picked out by our concepts matters. Second, this error-theoretic strategy won't work for other notions that are under attack by the anti-realist.

normatively special that would satisfy **Independence** and **Real Explanation**. We can call this Dasgupta's *Absence of Value Problem*.³⁰

We can motivate the problem using the previously mentioned solutions. If Finlay's aim is to use linguistic data to show that our normative terms have end-relational truth-functional analyses, this may establish moral cognitivism. However, it does little for the *realist* project as construed above. Consider **Independence**. His analysis of normativity is both mind and language dependent. We are looking to actual linguistic practice, and furthermore, the truth of normative claims depends on what ends we actually adopt on the end-relational view.³¹ Consider **Real Explanation**. Just because we use normative language this way does not mean that we should. As Eklund (2017) has pointed out, there may be communities with normative concepts that have very different normative roles (e.g. they aren't motivated to act or to blame or praise others when they apply their concepts to actions or persons) or their concepts have the same role as ours but pick out different properties (e.g. they are motivated to act when they judge that something ought to be done but they judge that causing innocents to suffer ought to be done).³² The realist needs to explain why certain normative

³⁰ Note: There are actually two tasks that the realist must accomplish to solve the problem. First, the realist must provide an explanation for why some properties are normative rather than others that would satisfy **Independence** and **Real Explanation**. Second, once such an explanation has been provided, the realist may need to explain why some normative properties should guide theorizing and acting more so than other normative properties. The purpose of the paper is focused on achieving the first task. The proposal of the paper is that we can provide a real definition of what it takes for a property to be normative. Though I don't try to accomplish the second task here, I can think of two strategies. First, if we can establish that eliteness is normative, then perhaps only the elite (non-gerrymandered) properties are the ones that we should theorize with. Second, real definitions may themselves be relatively coarse-grained. Perhaps the correct real definition would be such that *utility* is a normative property but not *utility on Tuesday afternoons*.

³¹ Finlay (forthcoming) points out that the "grip" that normativity is supposed to have on us is dependent on our perspective. Moral language is truth-functional and moral thought is cognitive. However, morality gets its grip on us only when we have the ends that would make moral sentences true.

³² For a detailed discussion of normative roles, see Dunaway (manuscript).

concepts and the properties they pick out should guide our behavior rather than alternative concepts or properties.

We might think that successfully ruling out alternatives would suffice. *Pace* Dasgupta, properties (or concepts) are sparse and some are more metaphysically fundamental than others. For example, on McPherson and Dunaway's (2017) approach, certain properties are elite and serve as reference magnets for the most general (i.e. authoritative) normative concepts. Suppose there is a perfectly elite property of *authoritative oughtness* that serves as the reference magnet for the authoritative normative concept AUTHORITATIVE OUGHT. Also suppose that any normal rational being possesses that concept and thus refers to *authoritative oughtness* because it is a reference magnet.

Unfortunately, even with these heavy-duty assumptions, the offered explanation won't do. Even ruling out different possibilities, the realist has not made any headway in satisfying **Real Explanation**. Perhaps our acting and theorizing are guided by certain properties – even necessarily so. This does not answer the question of why they should guide our acting and theorizing.³³

While on the subject of eliteness, Dasgupta (2018) has explicitly argued against the possibility that a realist explanation can be provided for why eliteness is normatively special. There are two explanatory strategies here. First, claim that our mental states (e.g. beliefs) aim

³³ Perhaps the realist could appeal to an ought/should implies can principle. However, I'm skeptical that the realist can pull this strategy off. First, we plausibly act and theorize to a variety of properties (many of which intuitively shouldn't guide theorizing and acting (e.g. theorizing in accordance with magic, acting in accordance with cruelty). Second, Dunaway (manuscript) has argued that use and eliteness can only do so much in restricting reference. There are nearby possible worlds with slightly different normative concepts that pick out slightly different extensions. Given these alternative possibilities, he thinks that we may simply lack knowledge of many first-order normative claims.

at eliteness.³⁴ Second, claim that eliteness should guide theorizing in virtue of its connection to some other property that should guide theorizing (e.g. truth). Prospects are grim for both strategies in terms of satisfying **Independence** and **Real Explanation**. First, while it may be true that belief aims at truth, it's unclear whether they aim at eliteness. Second, even if they do, it won't help. It seems to be a contingent matter that we have beliefs that aim at eliteness. For all we know, we could have had qbeliefs that aimed at qeliteness instead. Even supposing that mental states and properties aren't cheap (i.e. it's impossible to have qbeliefs that aim at qeliteness), we can still ask why we should theorize in accordance to eliteness even if we, in fact, do. To claim that we should theorize in accordance with eliteness just because our beliefs/theorizing aims at it would be an explanation that implicitly relies on our psychologies or contingent practices – things the realist can't appeal to in her explanation if she wants to satisfy **Independence**. Finally trying to connect eliteness with other metaphysical notions won't help either since we can presumably run the same argument for those notions as well.

One might be tempted to think that truth is not subject to such worries but

Dasgupta (manuscript, 24) tells us to think again:

But properties are cheap. If a property P confers significance on truth, another property Q will stand to quuth just as P stands to truth; hence Q would confer equal significance on quuth. So, for truth to be special, P must somehow be special too. But if some further property P* confers significance on P, there'd be another property Q* that conferred equal significance on Q. And so on. This is a disaster for the realist. As I tell my kids in darker moments, if everyone's special no one's special. Thus, for truth to be special in the way that the realist needs, whatever ultimately confers

³⁴ Wedgwood (2007) defends similar ideas when claiming that mental states are normative. In particular, beliefs aim at the true and intentions aim at the good.

significance on truth must have normative significance all on its own, not in virtue of anything else. This is primitivism.

This last quote lays out Dasgupta's challenge against the moral realist clearly and is worth closer examination.

Dasgupta is not asking the realist to provide a semantic or conceptual analysis of normative properties or concepts (i.e. the typical answers to the Open Question Argument).³⁵ By the realist's own lights, such analyses won't satisfy **Independence** or **Real Explanation**. Instead, he is forcing the realist to provide an *explanation* for why any property is normative (why it should guide theorizing and acting). For Dasgupta, the explanation must take a certain form. The passage above suggests that he accepts the following principle.

Regress Stopper: A property is normative if and only if (a) it is conferred normativity by another property or (b) is, by itself, normative.

He demands that the realist explain what it is that *makes* a property normative. Given **Regress Stopper**, at some point, it seems that the realist must posit, as a matter of brute fact, that certain properties are normative all on their own, "not in virtue of anything else." Dasgupta thinks that any sort of realist is thus committed to brute and utterly mysterious claims about normativity. This is primitivism.³⁶ Let's call this the *Primitivist Charge*. A careless realist may think that accepting the *Primitivist Charge* is no problem. We may already accept primitivism about material composition. What's the problem with primitivism about normativity? However, we've noted that this won't do because the realist's account of

³⁵ I point out in section 1.1.3 that what the Open Question Argument really shows us is that the realist should be seeking real definitions of normative properties rather than conceptual or semantic analyses.

³⁶ Though McPherson (forthcoming) is not a proponent of primitivism, he admits that this is a possibility that the realist must consider.

practical and theoretical deliberation presupposes that we can know what the normative properties are. Primitivism seems to rule this out.

1.1.3 The Irrelevance of Moral Realism

We can further illustrate this point (e.g. the second aim of the anti-realist) further by examining Clarke-Doane's argument (forthcoming b). Building on Dasgupta's results, Clarke-Doane argues that even if some form of realism is true, it is irrelevant to practical or theoretical deliberation (as conceived by the realist). This is because practical or theoretical deliberation presupposes that certain properties are normative, but the realist can't provide us an explanation that would allow us to find out what such properties are. He concludes that practical and theoretical deliberation is not just a matter of finding out the facts. The argument runs roughly as follows:³⁷

- (1) The logical principle of weakening tells us: If we can conclude C from A, then we can also conclude C from A combined with any arbitrary premise X.

³⁷ The argument is drawn from the following passage from Clarke-Doane (manuscript, 238):

It might help to picture the point in terms of the logical law of weakening. This says that if a conclusion, C, follows from premise A, then C certainly follows from premises A and B. Now suppose that we have no doubt that, say, responsibility entails retribution in our present circumstance. This cannot settle whether to retribute, by weakening. For we can stipulatively introduce a responsibility-like concept, responsibility* according to which responsibility* does not entail retribution (or retribution*) in our present circumstance. And given the premises that responsibility entails retribution and that responsibility* does not, the question arises whether to hold people responsible or responsible*. Since the fact that responsibility entails retribution in our present circumstance does not settle the question of whether to retribute in tandem with the premise that responsibility* does not entail retribution, it cannot settle the question of whether to retribute on its own. (Of course, strictly speaking, the logical law of weakening does not apply, since the "conclusion" at issue is not a proposition. I will have more to say about this in a moment.) **In a slogan: settling the facts, even the evaluative facts, fails to settle the questions at the center of our evaluative lives** (my emphasis).

Clarke-Doane (forthcoming a) appeals to a similar strategy to argue that there is no privileged notion of metaphysical possibility by which we should organize our metaphysical theorizing. Which notion to use is ultimately decided by our practical interests.

- (2) If ought truths settle the matter of what to do, then ought truths should satisfy the law of weakening even when we add ought* truths.
- (3) They don't.
- (4) Therefore, ought truths to do does not settle the matter of what to do.

The conclusion is shocking. The aim of practical deliberation – figuring out what to do – cannot be achieved by discovering the ought truths. Grant to the realist that moral realism is true and grant all the ought truths she wants. All the truths of the world can't settle practical deliberation. The motivation for positing moral realism is undercut. Dasgupta's conclusion is that perhaps practical and theoretical deliberation isn't about finding the truths at all.³⁸ There are legitimate worries for the argument.³⁹ Nonetheless, I suspect there are ways to regiment the argument that would address them. Bracketing these concerns, what's the motivation for believing premises (2) and (3)?

Suppose it's true that we ought to X. If ought truths settle the question of what to do, then we should conclude to do X once we discover the truth that we ought to do X. Clarke-Doane says not so fast. Suppose it's also true that we ought* not to X where ought*

³⁸ Clarke-Doane (forthcoming a) conceives of practical and theoretical deliberation as primarily a question of what to do and what to believe. Yet, since he does not think that such questions are settled by truths about what we ought to do or believe, it's unclear what would settle such questions. On p. 239-240, he suggests that the relevant resolving attitude would involve some attitude between a belief and an intention. But this doesn't get at the deeper issue. **Note:** the realist can say something similar. Beliefs about what one ought to do or believe settle the question about what to do or believe but another mental state (e.g. intention) may be needed to actually do the action or form the belief that is settled by practical and theoretical deliberation. See section 1.4.1 for further discussion.

³⁹ For example, deontic logics typically aren't non-monotonic anyway so it's not obvious why weakening would apply. Also, if "what to do?" is just the same question as "what one ought to do"? weakening does apply, and the question is settled. Lastly, if ought* and ought truths involve contradictory premises, then by *ex falso quodlibet*, anything follows.

is some other normative concept or a concept with the same inferential role as ought but picks out a different extension in another possible world (e.g. suppose it's true that we ought* to murder babies for personal pleasure). Weakening tells us that given the truth that we ought to X, even if it's also true that we ought* not to X, we should still be able to conclude that X is the thing to do. Clarke-Doane argues we can't. This is not just a matter of Hume's Law (e.g. that no normative conclusions can follow factual premises).⁴⁰ Instead, Clarke-Doane points out that in order for ought truths to satisfying weakening (thereby settling the question of what to do), the realist must explain why the properties tracked by ought truths are the ones we should abide by in our acting and theorizing as opposed to ought* truths. Just as we can ask why we should theorize in accordance with eliteness rather than qeliteness or reference rather than qreference, we can ask why we should conclude practical deliberation by properly responding to the ought truths rather than ought* truths.

Clarke-Doane can now use Dasgupta's arguments above to point out that there aren't realist-friendly explanations to break the asymmetry between ought-truths and ought*-truths. As noted, appeals to eliteness won't work. Neither do appeals to the aims of mental states or actions. They fail to satisfy **Independence** and **Real Explanation**. As we saw earlier in the long quote from Dasgupta, the realist must find a way to show that ought truths and ought* truths are asymmetric – that the former truths track a property that is normatively special while the latter don't. A colorful way to put it is that ought truths are somehow Really True while ought* truths aren't. Furthermore, Really True facts should

⁴⁰ See van Roojen (2018) for responses to Hume's Law.

guide theorizing and action just because they are Really True. But, this as Dasgupta has pointed is primitivism about normativity.⁴¹

At this point, Dasgupta and Clarke-Doane invite the realist to join their side. Primitivism about normativity is ultimately unacceptable for the realist. Even if **No Explanation** is strictly false given primitivism (e.g. there are normative properties that normative without explanation), the motivation for realism as the basis for practical and theoretical deliberation is undercut. Primitivism rules out the possibility of knowing what properties are normative which makes practical and theoretical deliberation (as conceived by the realist) impossible.

The anti-realist/pragmatist claims instead to have the following explanatory advantage:

Advantage: Anti-realists don't have an *Absence Value Problem* and the *Primitivist Charge* does not apply. We "should" theorize and act in accordance with certain properties because doing so serves our interests. Any other explanation is just bluffing.

If the anti-realist is right, realism can't deliver the goods that motivated it in the first place. The truth of realism won't help us understand theoretical and practical deliberation after all. We'll see in section 1.3 that they are wrong. We'll also see in section 1.4 that a

⁴¹ Dasgupta (manuscript, 26) writes:

Our theory is ideal by our standards and does everything we want of it—it's even true! All we've been told is that it lacks some extra primitive property, but so what? That's a minor curiosity at most. No one should seriously suggest that we scrap 500 years of post-enlightenment science and develop an entirely new theory on which pigs fly! Thus, if there is such a thing as Real Truth, it's just another property out there along with the Tolkenian property. To strike out in a radical effort to uncover it, insisting that pigs really do fly, would be, quite literally, madness.

thoroughgoing anti-realism not only can't help us understand theoretical and practical deliberation. It makes it impossible.

1.1.4 Foreshadowing

To foreshadow what is to come, standard responses to Open Question Arguments usually appeal to semantic and conceptual claims about our language, conceptual schemes, or psychologies. What Dasgupta points out is that such answers should not satisfy realists as they are mind and language dependent.⁴²

However, Dasgupta's charge that realists are committed to primitivism is made plausible only if the realist's explanatory requirement must be constrained by **Regress Stopper**. Dasgupta asks what needs to be *conferred* onto a property that would *make it* normative and ultimately thinks that the only thing the realist can do is go primitivist: posit that there just are normative properties that are normative all on their own. This, Dasgupta charges, is positing brute or primitive normativity – something that realists should avoid but seemingly can't.

Two points. First, the realist should not try to answer Dasgupta's question of what *makes* or *confers* normativity to a property. The question is misleading. Instead, the realist should provide a real definition of normative property that is (a) mind and language independent that (b) tells us *what it is* for a property *to be* normative. For example, something is a university if and only if, and because it is an accredited institution of higher learning where faculty members and students engage in certain academic and social activities. To ask

⁴² Dasgupta's challenge may equally apply to Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014) who appeal to moral-fixed points (i.e. conceptual moral truths).

what confers such an institution the status of university makes no sense.⁴³ That's just *what it is to be* a university. Likewise, if the realist can provide a mind and language independent real definition of normative property that tells us what it is to be such a property, then Dasgupta's claim that something must confer normativity on any given property is misleading. The anti-realist can't ask what makes the real definition normative or what makes the analysis normative. Satisfying the analysis is just what it is for a property to be normative!

Second, if such a realist-friendly real definition can be provided, and the anti-realist has no general argument against such definitions, then the realist has a solution to the *Absence of Value* problem that avoids the *Primitivist Charge*. Real definitions are both explanatory and informative (i.e. they tell us what it is for something to be a certain way) and are thus not primitive posits.⁴⁴ Once such a real definition is given, the realist can appeal to it in order to identify normative properties (i.e. properties we should abide by in our acting and thinking). Realism can provide a secure foundation for practical and theoretical deliberation (as conceived by the realist) after all.

Rather than reading Dasgupta's challenge as a rejection of real definition (which he is sympathetic to in Dasgupta (2014)), there is a more charitable version of the *Absence of Value* problem: the realist must provide a real definition of normative property that meets her own commitments. We'll return to the notion of real definition and consider what a realist-friendly real definition of normative property should look like in section 1.3.

⁴³ Perhaps universities are conferred their status from the state or accredited by some governing body. But then again, we can just build this into the real definition of university.

⁴⁴ I consider whether (though advise against) the anti-realist can reject real definitions all together in sections 1.3 and 1.4.

1.2 Indirect Strategies

The realist has two strategies for resisting the challenge. The first strategy is indirect. Rather than attack the premises directly (e.g. **Explanatory Requirement** and **No Explanation**), she shows that the argument is self-undermining. The second strategy attacks the premises directly and denies that the anti-realist has any explanatory advantage over her view. Let's consider the indirect strategies first.

1.2.1 Self-Undermining

The realist could point out that the anti-realist argument is self-undermining. If **Explanatory Requirement** and **No Explanation** are to be perfectly general, then the anti-realist must accept the following argument:

- (1) If soundness should guide our theorizing, then there must be an explanation for why this is so.
- (2) There is no explanation for why soundness should guide our theorizing.
- (3) Therefore, it is not the case that soundness is theory-guiding.

Suppose we grant to the anti-realist that her argument is sound.⁴⁵ The anti-realist has now provided a sound argument for the claim that soundness is not theory-guiding. If soundness is not theory-guiding, then why should any of us care about the conclusions of

⁴⁵ If not, then either it is invalid or one of the premises is false. If invalid, then the realist can diffuse the challenge altogether. I discuss this in the next subsection. If one of the premises is false, the realist may either reject the need for explanation or make a case for optimism: if we can explain why soundness is theory-guiding, then we can hold out hope explanations for other properties are forthcoming. I discuss this in 1.3.

sound arguments? The conclusion of the anti-realist argument seems to tell us that we have no reason to accept it.⁴⁶

The first anti-realist response is to employ a strategy from Wittgenstein:⁴⁷

My arguments serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands them to be sound recognizes that soundness does not matter. When she understands the argument, she needs to step beyond it. She must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after she has climbed up it.

This may sound infuriating, but the anti-realist response is consistent. The anti-realist need not presume that soundness matters in order to get her point across. Instead, the anti-realist is showing how the realist has been talking nonsensically:

I admit that no properties matter in the way that you seem to think. But suppose some properties do matter. Let's grant that soundness is theory-guiding. Here's a sound argument that shows that it doesn't. Isn't that unsettling? Look realist, we think that soundness "should" guide our theorizing. However, soundness "should" do so because it serves our interests. We grant that this may not be true if we had different interests. The problem with realism is that it attempts to say more. You, realists are attempting to explain why soundness (or any other property) matters regardless of our interests by appealing to the properties themselves. Our point is that we don't see how this is possible.

Even supposing that this response is insufficient, the realist should not rest content. Even if the *Absence of Value* argument is self-undermining with respect to soundness, it's unclear that it is self-undermining with respect to other properties. Furthermore, showing

⁴⁶ Streumer (2017) defends a normative error theory that leads to this result.

⁴⁷ Wittgenstein (2001) (originally published in 1922) writes:

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them - as steps - to climb beyond them. He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it (6.54).

that an argument is self-undermining is only a means to a further end. If an argument is self-undermining, this usually indicates that the argument is somehow unsound. Realists need to provide a diagnosis for why this is so, not just that it is so. Finally, the anti-realist poses a legitimate challenge. Realism says that certain properties matter for our theorizing and acting. The anti-realist is legitimately requesting the realist to defend this claim. They must either convincingly claim that no explanation is needed (denying **Explanatory Requirement**) or they must offer up a mind and language independent explanation that is satisfactory (denying **No Explanation**).

1.2.2 Taking the Question Seriously

The direct self-undermining strategy might not work but there might be another undermining strategy that could. The explanation that the anti-realist demands is normative. The anti-realist seems to be asking two normative why questions: Why *ought* we theorize and act in accordance with property P? Why *ought* we believe that property P is special (i.e. should guide our theorizing and acting) rather than some other property P*? But, if the anti-realist is seriously asking these questions, then the realist may object as to whether she can even do so coherently. If they take their own questions seriously, then presumably ought truths about what to believe and what properties to theorize and act in accordance with would settle these questions. But Clarke-Doane and Dasgupta can't think this unless they take ought truths to be special over ought* truths. Yet, Clarke-Doane and Dasgupta's point is that even if there is something normatively special about ought truths over ought* truths, we can't know what it would even be. Here's the realist objection: Clarke-Doane and Dasgupta are arguing that the realist can't answer certain questions which they themselves can't take seriously.

It's tempting for the realist to claim victory. Unfortunately, the anti-realist can respond much in the same way as she did before:

Sharp observation realist! And you're right. Ultimately, *we* don't take our own questions seriously. We might say that we act and theorize in accordance with some property P because it serves our interests but that's an empirical claim rather than a normative/reason-giving claim. For all we know, some other property P* may serve our quinterests. And, being consistent anti-realists, we don't claim that interests are somehow special or asymmetric when compared to quinterests. The main problem is that *you* – the realist – *do* think that these questions are intelligible. Insofar as you think these questions are intelligible, you're the one who has to show why ought facts matter rather than ought* facts. If you're worried that our use of “should” or “matter” is illicit, then we can put it this way: what makes *reference, eliteness, essence, modality, beliefs, goodness, pleasure, desire* etc. normatively special? We just don't see how you can provide an explanation that satisfies **Independence** and **Real Explanation** without positing some form of primitivism.⁴⁸

1.3 Defining the Presence of Value

Having considered the indirect strategy, I propose that the realist attack the *Absence of Value Problem* directly. While I invite realists with a Moorean bent to continue denying **Explanatory Requirement** and to try additional burden-of-proof volleying tactics, the present section takes aim at **No Explanation**. In this section, I first introduce the notion of real definition proposed by Rosen (2015) and note several examples of such definitions in ethics. I then show how an appeal to real definition is uniquely placed to respond to

⁴⁸ The following quote from Eklund (2017, 9) illustrates the point:

[T]he appeal to normativity... immediately simply prompts the follow-up question of what it is for a property to be normative. As it stands the appeal to normativity is just a promissory note. And if it is suggested that normativity is a primitive feature of properties, not capable of being further elucidated in independent terms, then questions arise about why having this primitive feature matters. For example, Bad Guy [i.e. the proponent of alternative normative concepts that we find objectionable] can insist that even if the property ascribed by his notion of what is right does not have this primitive feature of normativity, it is still normative* – and what privileges normativity over normativity*?

Dasgupta’s primitivism charge and to Open Question Arguments generally. I then consider how **Independence** and **Real Explanation** can be recast as limits on the types of real definitions that the realist can provide.

1.3.1 What is a Real Definition?

In giving real definitions, we are not trying to define concepts or words. Instead, real definitions attempt to define properties, relations, entities, and other mind and language independent entities. Following Rosen (2015), to say that Φ (a fact or propositional function) defines F (some property, relation, or entity) is just to say the following:

Real Definition: Necessarily, when a thing is F , it is F *if and only if*, and because, it is Φ .⁴⁹⁵⁰

Understood this way, real definition is not a technical or spooky notion. We posit and use such definitions all the time. Recall the university example. Something is a university if and only if, and because, it is an accredited institution of higher learning where faculty members and students engage in certain academic and social activities. Discussions of real

⁴⁹ The specific formal definition Rosen gives is a bit more complicated. First, in order to account for a principle called Weak Formality while still getting the result that $\text{Def}(F, \Phi)$ entails $\Box \forall x (Fx \leftrightarrow \Phi x)$, Rosen proposes:

$$\text{Def}(F, \Phi) \text{ iff } \forall x ((Fx \vee \Phi x) \rightarrow (Fx \leftarrow \Phi x))$$

This is the formal statement of **Real Definition**. Rosen then suggests that if we are to accept an essentialist idiom from Fine, we should go with the following:

$$\text{Def}(F, \Phi) \text{ iff } {}_F \forall x ((Fx \vee \Phi x) \rightarrow (Fx \leftarrow \Phi x))$$

Rosen prefers this latter statement, but for our purposes, it won’t matter. Stated in English “... to define a property F is to specify some condition Φ such that it lies in F ’s nature that whenever a thing is F , or Φ , the fact that it is F is grounded in the fact that it is Φ .”

⁵⁰ I should note that for the context of our paper, the “thing” that is F will be a property. What the realist needs to do is provide an explanation of what it is for a property to be normative (i.e. what it is for a property to be such that we should act and think in accordance to it).

definition often (Rosen included) appeal to metaphysical grounding and essence. There are also issues concerning how fine-grained real definitions can be. While these topics may be interesting in their own right, addressing them will distract us from the current issue.⁵¹ For our purposes, all we need is that real definitions are asymmetric and objectively explanatory. The fact that a thing bears a certain relation or property is explained by another fact about that thing and not the other way around.⁵² Understood this way, there are many examples of metaethical and normative theses regarding the connection between the normative and natural that can be stated as real definitions:⁵³

Reasons (relation): Necessarily, R is a reason for X to do A, iff, and because, there is some p such that X has a desire whose object is p, and the truth of R is part of what explains why X's doing A promotes P (Schroeder 2007).

Principle of Utility: Necessarily, an action is required iff, and because, it maximizes happiness.

Principle of Fidelity: Necessarily, if an action breaks a promise, then that makes it the case that the action is *prima facie* wrong.

Maybe these definitions are wrong, but no one should doubt that they are informative and worthy of consideration.

⁵¹ That said, Leary (2017) defends non-naturalism by appealing to essences rather than to real definition because it allows her to respond to McPherson's bruteness revenge problem for non-naturalism.

⁵² For discussion of how grounding talk is a perfectly sensible non-technical notion, see Berker (forthcoming).

⁵³ The latter two are formulated in Berker (forthcoming) but the former is inspired by Bentham and the latter is inspired by Ross. I should also note that Berker discusses these principles with regard to whether they themselves serve as grounds in moral explanations. Non-naturalists claim that there is an independent role for such principles to play in grounding explanations and that's why naturalism is false. Rosen (2015) picks up this issue as well. Though Berker argues that moral principles aren't part of grounding explanations (they are redundant in such explanations), he thinks that pretty much any realist metaethical theory ends up being a form of non-naturalism insofar as it posits some normative primitive or moral principle that grounds the moral facts in the natural facts.

1.3.2 Why Real Definition?

Having the notion of real definition in mind along with a few examples, we can now see how the notion can be used to respond to Dasgupta and Clarke-Doane's arguments.

1.3.2.1 Blocking the Primitivist Challenge

First, appealing to real definition allows the realist to block Dasgupta's *Primitivist Charge*. Recall, Dasgupta asks what *makes* a property normative. He then notes that given **Regress Stopper**, the realist must claim that either some properties are conferred normativity by some other property or there has to be properties that are inexplicably normative all on their own and not in virtue of anything else. We've seen how this kind of primitivism is unacceptable.

In response, I've pointed out that the realist can do better by rejecting **Regress Stopper**. Instead, she can provide a real definition of normative property that tells us what *it is* for some property *to be* normative. Admittedly, such a definition could appeal to facts that involve other properties, relations, or entities. But note once a real definition is proposed, the anti-realist can't ask the realist what makes the analysans normative. That's because what it is to be normative is for an entity to satisfy the conditions set by the analysans of the definition. The university example was a case in point. Of course, the anti-realist can criticize the definition for other reasons (extensional adequacy, ontological profligacy etc.) but such criticisms are far more manageable. Understood this way, the anti-realist is just asking the realist to do philosophy by defending her definition.

Once such a definition is offered by the realist, we can still debate about whether the definition is any good. Importantly, in telling us what it is to be a normative property, the realist is not positing primitivism in Dasgupta's pejorative sense. She is directly addressing

the explanatory demand. The realist can then use the definition to identify normative properties and tell us which properties we should abide by in our theorizing and acting.

1.3.2.2 Another Look at the Open Question Argument

Second, the realist should find the appeal to real definition particularly attractive because it allows her to see what the Open Question Argument gets right and what it gets wrong. Rosen's (2015) motivating discussion for real definition is illuminating:⁵⁴

... when we ask what it is for a thing to be a person or for a creature to be conscious or for a fact to be a law of nature or for two expressions to be synonymous or for an object to be colored or for an action to be free or for an artifact to be an artwork, we are best understood as seeking real definitions of the properties, kinds, and relations that figure in our questions, rather than semantic or conceptual equivalents, even when the correctness of the account is meant to be recognizable a priori. **The main argument for this view is that when we try to answer these questions, we are happy to entertain analyses cast in terms that fully competent masters of the analysandum need not grasp. We have no conception of semantic or conceptual analysis on which this makes sense; and yet our analytical questions do make sense. And this suggests our questions are not semantic or conceptual questions after all, but rather metaphysical questions that call for definitions of properties and other aspects of mind-independent reality** (my emphasis).

Realists are trying to discover the relationship between normative properties and natural properties. What the Open Question Argument shows us is that one way of doing this will not succeed. If realists are ultimately trying to provide a semantic or conceptual analysis of our words or concepts, then once such an analysis is found, it should settle the

⁵⁴ Rosen (2015, 189).

matter – the question should be “closed”. The Open Question Argument seems to suggest that no such analysis can close the question – an explanatory gap will always remain.

However, this should not be taken, on its own, to favor either non-naturalism or non-cognitivism. Instead, the lesson the realist should take from the Open Question Argument is that discovering the relationship between normative and natural properties was never a matter of conceptual or semantic analysis in the first place. Instead, discovering the relationship between normative and natural properties is a matter of finding the real definition of one set of properties in terms of the other.⁵⁵ Such a definition tells us what such properties are. And as Rosen points out, just like any substantive debate about real definitions in philosophy, a real definition of normative property need not command acceptance from all disputants who are competent with the concept **NORMATIVE PROPERTY**.

In short, the Open Question Argument may rule out the possibility of providing semantic or conceptual analyses if interpreted as a demand for real definition. But that’s no problem for the realist who is ready to provide such a real definition of normative property knowing that such definitions won’t compel universal acceptance anyway.

1.3.2.3 Why Conceptual and Semantic Analyses Won’t Work

Finally, the emphasis on real definition also helps us understand why appeals to conceptual or semantic analysis, along with appeals to our mental states should be unsatisfactory for the realist. The realist who claims that there are normative properties that

⁵⁵ Or, if you’re a non-naturalist, you don’t think any such definition is possible, but you might appeal to essentialist facts to explain supervenience as Leary (2017) does.

should guide our theorizing and acting owes us a real definition of those properties – a definition that (a) does not just appeal to how we use words or how we think about such properties and (b) does not merely state that certain properties do guide our theorizing or acting. While some realists have explicitly tried to provide such definitions (and perhaps others are trying to do so inadvertently),⁵⁶ appealing to semantic externalism and reference magnets to provide semantic analyses of normative terms or claims about what properties our mental states actually aim at won't provide the realist with plausible real definitions of normative property (even if they may serve as legitimate answers to other questions). Dasgupta's challenge is really a reminder to the realist to deliver the goods: put up the real definition that meets your own criteria or shut up.

1.3.2.4 An Objection: The Appeal to Real Definition

At this point, some thoroughgoing anti-realists have had enough. Given their commitments, they have no reason to abide by real definitions rather than qreal qdefinitions. To appeal to real definitions is illegitimate in the present context. Unless we can establish that our theorizing should be guided by real definitions, appealing to them in the dialectic is off limits. This is akin to foot-stomping primitivism. The irony is that if this is what Dasgupta thinks now, he is undermining his prior work (2014) in which he argues that real

⁵⁶ Schroeder (2007, ch. 3) explicitly notes that he is providing a constitutive account of reasons – an account of what it is for something to a fact to be a reason for an agent to do some action. That said, it's unclear whether Schroeder counts as a realist in the sense I defined at the beginning of the chapter. This is because reasons are grounded in an agent's desires on his view.

definitions (or at least essentialist facts) aren't subject to further explanation. He makes free use of them to defend the possibility of physicalism.⁵⁷

Ad hominem aside, the realist ultimately can't force the anti-realist to heed anything – let alone real definitions. It's a shouting match. The realist is claiming that the anti-realist charge works only if real definitions can't be provided. But they can be provided, and we have a default presumption that they should guide our theorizing. The anti-realist is so adamant about the lack of any possible explanation for why we should act or theorize in accordance with any property that she is willing to argue the other way instead. Because no such explanations are possible, we can't take real definition seriously either and we're certainly not willing to grant to the realist that we should theorize in accordance with them.⁵⁸

To end the shouting match, I propose the realist spot the anti-realist her skepticism but proceed to show her that this will come at a significant cost. First, as Rosen (2015) noted above, many philosophical questions are posed as demands for real definition. If we want to reject the idea that real definitions should guide our theorizing full-stop, then we should be skeptical of engaging in philosophy generally as many of its questions are plausibly read as demands for real definition. I suspect that moral anti-realists may be *moral* anti-realists but still maintain optimism about other domains of philosophy. Second, a thoroughgoing anti-realism of the kind that Dasgupta espouses leads to catastrophic results: theoretical and

⁵⁷ Physicalism about the mental can be stated as a real definition: an agent has a conscious state iff, and because, that agent instantiates certain physical states. If real definitions are not subject to further explanation and are themselves not subject to be grounded in physical facts, then they pose no counter-example to physicalism.

⁵⁸ It should be noted that Dasgupta thinks that we "should" theorize with certain properties because they serve our interests. So perhaps Dasgupta is willing to appeal to real definition. However, he thinks there are quinterests that are normatively on a par with interests and the former may best be served by theorizing with real definitions.

practical deliberation turn out to be impossible. I argue for this latter result in section 1.4 and note that Dasgupta himself acknowledges this.

Dasgupta's acceptance of these results suggests that we really are dealing with a certain kind of unanswerable skeptic. Just as there is no argument that would convince the Pyrrhonian skeptic to drop her skepticism, there may be no argument against a thoroughgoing anti-realist like Dasgupta to drop her anti-realism. But note that if the point of the debate is to make a case to the philosopher who is already sympathetic to **Fact** or, at least, not already committed to thoroughgoing anti-realism, then it's clear which side such a philosopher should favor once the consequences are laid out: the side that at least accepts that real definitions should guide theorizing and takes practical and theoretical deliberation to be possible. Whether we are to be skeptical that other properties are normative is a separate matter that should be established with further debate.

Lastly, I suspect that most anti-realists who are drawn to Dasgupta's argument are not worried about real definitions *per se*.⁵⁹ Instead these anti-realists are worried about whether any realist-friendly real definition can ever compel universal consent (e.g. we can always question whatever real definition is offered). But as we noted, we shouldn't expect real definitions to compel this kind of consent anyway. Interesting philosophical questions involve providing real definitions and perhaps none of them have compelled universal

⁵⁹ Earlier, Dasgupta wasn't this skeptical. In (2017, 312), he explicitly considers whether appealing to real definition could solve the non-naturalist's problems. He argues that non-naturalists who claim that goodness is identical to a *sui generis* property P cannot appeal to real definition because for something to be *sui generis* is for it to be undefinable. He never claims that we appealing to real definitions are off limits. Furthermore, normative realists need not posit that normative properties are *sui generis*. Also, if Leary (2017) is right, there are ways of getting around this that appeal to essential truths instead. Curiously, Dasgupta does not consider the possibility of real definition in (2018) or (manuscript). Perhaps it's in these papers that he finally becomes a thorough-going anti-realist that is willing to doubt whether we should theorize with real definitions at all.

consent. If the anti-realist is willing to accept real definitions and is willing to engage in philosophical questions generally, then her best bet against the realist is to argue with her opponent on neutral ground. The best way to proceed on both sides is to consider the best real definitions of normative property that the anti-realist and the realist can come up with and then see which one is better (e.g. which one is extensionally adequate, explanatorily powerful, ontologically conservative, theoretically simple, etc.).

1.3.3 Avoiding Pitfalls

Let's assume for now that all sides are willing to appeal to real definitions. If the anti-realist challenge is best understood as a demand for a real definition from the realist, then the realist must provide one.⁶⁰ I won't attempt to propose one here. Instead, I'll consider how the anti-realist's objections can be interpreted as restrictions on what such a definition could be. I'll then consider two examples that meet these restrictions. We can restate the previous desiderata as follows:

Independence Requirement: the real definition must be mind-language independent

Real Explanation Requirement: the real definition cannot simply state that we *do* theorize and act in accordance with the putative property.

Furthermore, the anti-realist has pointed out that if realists want their view to make sense of practical and theoretical deliberation, then the realist must provide a plausible epistemology for how we come to know what these properties are.

⁶⁰ As noted, we are giving a real definition of a second-order property: the normativity of a property.

Epistemic Requirement: the real definition must allow rational beings to know what such the normative properties are.

We can illustrate why these constraints on real definition make sense by the realist's own lights by considering some examples of real definition that violate these constraints.

Consider the following definition:

Def 1: A property p is normative iff, and because, P is a property that is aimed at by our mental states in action and deliberation.

This definition won't do because it makes normativity dependent on our psychologies. We can see why the anti-realist posits q beliefs and q intentions that aim at q truths or q goodness. They don't have to think there really are such mental states or properties. Instead, their point is to remind the realist that defining normative properties in terms of our psychologies would lead to an unconvincing and arbitrary definition that is not metaphysically robust in the way the realist wants. The anti-realist is right to point out that the realist who posits **Def 1** (a) has to claim that normativity is kind or community-relative (to the psychology of the relevant beings or communities) or (b) motivate the significance of intentions and beliefs for defining normativity over other psychological states. Neither option seems all that attractive.⁶¹

The realist should also not settle for:

Def 2: A property p is normative iff, and because, P is a property that rational beings actually theorize and act in accordance with.

On this definition, truth and pain-reduction are normative because we actually theorize and act in accordance with them. Perhaps it is an informative explanation (that

⁶¹ Although Setiya (2012) seems to take option (a) by claiming that virtues may be kind-relative to different kinds of rational beings.

might attract the pragmatist anti-realist), but the realist must reject it. This is the simplest (and perhaps most implausible) version of constructivism which is incompatible with the mind and language independence condition for realism.

Finally, the realist should not settle for:

Def 3: A property *p* is normative iff, and because, *P* is a preferred property of the flying spaghetti monster.

Assuming that the thoughts of the flying spaghetti monster are unknowable to us, this definition would entail that knowledge of intrinsic properties is impossible. Such a realist definition would make practical and theoretical deliberation impossible. Of course, there is no such thing as a flying spaghetti monster, but there is a serious point to be made. Because the realist can provide a real definition, the *Primitivist Charge* does not apply – we are not precluded from knowledge of what such properties are. Nonetheless, not just any real definition will do. For theist realists who are inclined to give real definitions of normative properties by appealing to a deity, they should make sure that that deity does reveal its preferred properties to us so that we can act and theorize with those properties in our practical and theoretical deliberations.

1.3.4 Some Examples of Realist Real Definitions

What I've shown thus far is that if the research project of providing a realist-friendly real definition of normative property is viable, the realist has a response to Dasgupta's *Absence of Value* problem and the charge of primitivism. This response will also allow the realist to block Clarke-Doane's argument that realism is irrelevant to practical and theoretical deliberation. **No Explanation** is false – or at least the anti-realist has not established it. To do that, she will have to provide an argument against all possible realist-friendly real definitions. Good luck.

Though I have not gestured at any particular real definition, I have pointed out that the anti-realist's previous criticisms aren't misguided. What they've shown realists is that any real definition must satisfy **Independence Requirement**, **Real Explanation Requirement** and **Epistemic Requirement**. That said, satisfying the desiderata is not too demanding and many (perhaps neglected) possibilities are worth exploring. For example, a theistic real definition might go as follows:

Normative Concurrentism: A property P is normative iff, and because, acting and thinking in accordance with P is a way to reflect God's likeness.⁶²

If the realist is willing to think of mind and language independence as *human* mind and language independence, then such an explanation could satisfy the above desiderata assuming the theist realist also provides us with some way of knowing what God's likeness is (e.g. divine revelation, scripture, theophany etc.).

Or, suppose we go with another definition with a respectable lineage:

Aristotelian Naturalism: A property P is normative iff, and because, acting and thinking in accordance with P is a way for rational (or human) beings to flourish.⁶³

Assuming we have knowledge of what flourishing amounts to for humans or other rational beings and that what it is to flourish is not mind and language dependent, the above real definition would also satisfy our requirements.⁶⁴ Whether these definitions are plausible

⁶² The formulation is inspired by Murphy (2012) who defends the idea that goodness relative to a kind is a matter of being like God in a way that is appropriate to that kind.

⁶³ For a recent attempt to articulate an Aristotelian view that is not eudaimonistic, see Setiya (2012), (2018), and (manuscript).

⁶⁴ You might worry that such a definition appeals to something that is already normative (e.g. flourishing). Perhaps this is right, and flourishing is itself normative. Perhaps the worry here is that real definitions of normativity must be stated in completely non-normative terms. This may cause trouble for non-naturalists. That said, Leary (2017) provides an ingenious account of how normative properties supervene on

at the end of the day will depend on criteria that will apply for any kind of real definition (e.g. extensional adequacy, ontological parsimony, explanatory power, etc.). Advice to realists: keep at it.

1.4 Opening Possibilities: Pragmatism and Normative Cooperation

Once we note that the realist's task is to provide a realist-friendly real definition of normative property and that the anti-realist has no general argument against providing such real definitions that does not presuppose anti-realism, realists should simply get to work and try out different real definitions.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, I've pointed out that the anti-realist has raised legitimate worries as to how such a definition might go.

In this concluding section, I'll both be antagonistic and conciliatory towards anti-realism. First, the antagonism. I'll consider what a real definition of normativity might look like for the anti-realist. If she adopts it, she is subject to her own primitivist charge (whatever it may be) against the realist. If she rejects it, then she renders practical and theoretical deliberation impossible. Advice: take the former option, drop the *Primitivist Charge*, and just do more philosophy. Second, the conciliation. I'll consider what it would take for a realist to

natural properties even though the former still count as *sui generis*. She appeals to essences rather than real definition. Perhaps an appeal to essentialist facts (which may be partial rather than full definitions) would also allow us to block Dasgupta's worry.

⁶⁵ Schroeder (2007, 82) puts the point well (though he is talking about reductive accounts in the context of the passage):

But I do think that if what I've said here is on the right track, then figuring out whether any reductive view is true is not the sort of thing that we can do without getting our hands dirty. In the absence of any particular reductive account, we can point out the theoretical explanatory advantages of reductive accounts, and we can point out the challenges that they must overcome... **And similarly, the way to see whether normative properties like that of being a reason can be analyzed, is to propose your analysis, and see whether it checks out** (my emphasis).

provide a real definition that allows agents to play a role in determining which properties are normative.

1.4.1 Pragmatist Anti-Realism: A Dilemma

Suppose the anti-realist finds problems with all of the best realist real definitions. Perhaps they think that normativity must ultimately be a mind and language dependent phenomena and are convinced that normativity (if it is to exist at all) must be understood presentationally or projectively (i.e. properties aren't themselves normative but derive their normativity from our normative language and thought).⁶⁶ If so, here's what an anti-realist real definition of normativity might look like:

Anti-Realist Def: A property P is normative if and only if, and because, acting or theorizing in accordance with P serves human interests.

For example, perhaps the reason why truth and pain are normative properties is because acting and theorizing with them serves our interests. Fair but when a thoroughgoing anti-realist such as Dasgupta considers **Anti-Realist Def**, she faces a tough choice. She either (a) accepts the definition – in which case, she is in no better shape to respond to the *Primitivist Charge* raised against the realist or (b) rejects the definition – thereby making it unclear how practical and theoretical deliberation is even possible.

Here's why. Suppose she finds **Anti-Realist Def** attractive. First, she must allow for the possibility of real definition. Second, recall **Regress Stopper**. The anti-realist charges the realist for positing primitivism: there has to be some things that are intrinsically normative.

⁶⁶ See Eklund (2017, ch. 6) for a discussion of presentationalism which states that normative sentences are mind-independently true, but what they represent is not normative. On this view, there are no normative properties or facts.

While I pointed out that the appeal to real definition avoids this, the anti-realist may nonetheless still be tempted to think that the entities in the analyses of the real definition are what really count as brutally normative after all. Though we've seen this is false, suppose the anti-realist can't shake this temptation and thinks that some version of the *Primitivist Charge* remains even given the possibility of real definitions. If so, then the anti-realist who accepts **Anti-Realist Def** will have to accept that interests are brutally normative too! In other words, whatever the anti-realist takes the *Primitivist Charge* to be, it will apply equally to both the realist and the anti-realist who accepts **Anti-Realist Def**.

Now the anti-realist might not find **Anti-Realist Def** appealing. Instead, if she were consistent, then she would have to agree with Dasgupta:⁶⁷

In reality, our interests confer no more significance on reference than our quinterests confer on queference! So, at bottom the antirealist picture is just that we do what we do. Inside our language game (as it were) we can say that reference is special because of our interests, but outside of it there's nothing really special about interests. This is a queasy result, no doubt, but one avoids it only if one says that interests have some prior normative significance over quinterests. And the anti-realist cannot say this.

Having this kind of view not only makes much of philosophy impossible (e.g. since it's not the case that real definitions should guide theorizing), it also makes theoretical and practical deliberation impossible.

Here's why. If practical and theoretical deliberation is a matter of figuring out what to do or think, the thoroughgoing anti-realist is committed to telling us that there is

⁶⁷ Dasgupta (manuscript, 8). The mention of language games is worth noting. If the anti-realist rejects real definitions, then she will have to resort to conceptual or semantic analyses to determine which properties actually guide our theorizing and acting. But by her own lights, these analyses won't explain why we should act or theorize in accordance with any property. For example, if our best conceptual or semantic analyses suggest that we call properties normative insofar as acting or thinking in accordance with them serves our interests, the anti-realist would still want to ask why serving our interests makes a property normative.

ultimately nothing that we are to do or think (except whatever is licensed by the contingent language game we play). Perhaps acting and thinking in certain ways may satisfy our interests but even our interests aren't more normatively significant than our quinterests. In fact, take any way of acting and thinking (e.g. raping, pillaging, murdering, theorizing with magic etc.). We can always posit some other property or entity (e.g. q-interests) which will be served by acting and thinking in that way. Furthermore, according to the anti-realist, q-interests are normatively on a par with our interests. Thus, pillaging is ultimately normatively on a par with donating once we look past our language games. Such a view is not just queasy – it is repugnant.

Perhaps the anti-realist is perfectly willing to anchor our practical and theoretical deliberation in quick sand (i.e. our language games). But at this point, I propose that we take the starting point of this chapter – **Fact** – seriously. Again, to a philosopher who is not already entrenched in this form of anti-realism, if the result of such a view is that raping and pillaging is ultimately on a par with donating and alleviating suffering and the only thing that can break that tie is to appeal to our contingent language games, then what has to go is thoroughgoing anti-realism rather than the possibility of real definition.

At this point, we should remind ourselves of Clarke-Doane's argument. Clarke-Doane claims that realism is irrelevant because it can't help us make sense of practical and theoretical deliberation unless it posits primitively normative properties. I've argued that this is not true assuming that it's possible for the realist to provide a real definition of what it is for a property to be normative. But let's grant to the anti-realist that appealing to real definition is itself a kind of foot-stomping primitivism. Even so, the cost may still be right. The truth of anti-realism is not just irrelevant to practical and theoretical deliberation. It renders such deliberation senseless.

Two parting shots. First, the anti-realist position has unacceptable costs. The anti-realist must either reject the possibility of practical and theoretical deliberation, recognize that she can't believe or justify her own view to others, or provide some alternative account of practical and theoretical deliberation. I suspect the last route will be most attractive. Perhaps this might take the form of some global hermeneutical or even revolutionary fictionalism about *all* discourse.⁶⁸ I won't recite arguments against such views here. Nonetheless, I suspect that a philosopher neutral to these debates would consider radical reinterpretations of both practical and theoretical deliberation a considerable, if not, unacceptable cost. The realist, on the other hand, must defend a realist-friendly real definition of normative property. I've argued that providing such a real definition need not amount to primitivism. Furthermore, real definitions are ubiquitous. Philosophers don't see providing such definitions as a cost at all. In fact, we get paid to do it.

Second, even if realism must posit some form of primitivism which makes it impossible for us to know what the normative properties are on our own, this may still be preferable to anti-realism. We know that there are certain ways that we should act and think.

⁶⁸ See Kalderon (2005). As I point out, Clarke-Doane does not take truth alone to settle the practical question of what to do. Furthermore, it's unclear what would settle such questions. One suggestion drawn from (forthcoming a) is that perhaps practical and theoretical deliberation is a matter of coordinating our plans and interests. But of course, plans and interests aren't normatively special either. Curiously, Clarke-Doane (forthcoming b, 239-241) raises this question himself about what would settle practical and theoretical deliberation but leaves it unanswered:

But if the question of what to do is not a question of fact, then what would settle it? Settling it does not require acting, since we can resolve our deliberation as to whether to kill the one in the positive while failing to. But arguably intending to is not enough, despite what Gibbard (2003) suggests. After all, we may intend to do what (we would say in the vulgar) we believe that we ought not do. The elusive resolving attitude is apparently something in between acting and intending. Perhaps it can be informatively analyzed. Or maybe it must be taken as a primitive in moral psychology. However, whatever the attitude, the argument from pluralism would seem to show that we all have it -- whether we are realists or anti-realists. It is apparently "more" than intention and "less" than acting, but it is not belief. The question of what to do remains after all of our beliefs are all settled.

We may never know if we've gotten it right, but the proper response in the face of this may be a healthy humility with regard to our own claims to moral knowledge and a form of practical faith that either human nature or God grants us reliable access to such knowledge.⁶⁹

1.4.2 Normative Cooperation

I close with some conciliation. Perhaps the appeal of anti-realism is the idea that a stark realist account of normativity is alienating and bizarre. On a stark realist account, there are normative properties completely independent of our interests, goals, and projects. Practical deliberation is a matter of thinking and acting in accordance with the dictates of these mind and language independent normative properties. Instead of being slaves of the passions, we become slaves of normative reality.

A colorful way of illustrating this is to think of reasons. Assume for illustrative purposes that the reasons relation is the fundamental normative atom on which all other normative properties are built. On a stark realist view, practical deliberation is similar to being Mario in a Super Mario game. Reasons are like coins in the game. The goal of the game is to collect as many coins as possible. Suppose the coins are associated with different actions. After you're done collecting the coins, you weigh them. Whichever action is backed by the weightiest set of coins is the action you do. No ifs, ands, or buts. Little (2013, 117), in a slightly less colorful illustration writes:

On this view, agency is about responding to the determinations of reasons, and reasons don't determine until they necessitate. If we find pockets of latitude in life, it is only where those necessities can be

⁶⁹ Setiya (2012, ch. 4) makes this point. On his view, moral knowledge is possible either because God has secured it for us or we're, by nature, predisposed to have it. Setiya, goes for the latter view.

equally well satisfied by different options, like the two piles of hay facing Buridan's ass that would equally satisfy the need for food.

If the only realist views on offer involve real definitions of normative property that entail the above picture of rational agency, then that *would* be a strike against normative realism. However, this is not the case.

In fact, many philosophers in the broadly realist camp have provided accounts of reasons that do leave room for agents to play a role in determining what gets to count as normative. For example, we might understand Chang (2014) as follows:

Will-Based Reason: A fact F is a will-based reason for A, if and only if, and because, A wills an already existing reason to be A's reason for action.

Chang believes in objective externalist reasons. However, on her view, the will also plays a role in generating normativity. The agent who wills an existing reason to be her reason can increase the weight of that reason in determining what she is to do.

Realists might worry that Chang's view leaves agents with too much power in determining what to do.⁷⁰ Perhaps the best way to reject the stark realist picture in a realist-friendly way is to suggest that even though we don't get to create reasons, their normative strength can be understood as justifying rather than requiring action.⁷¹ Or, perhaps, even though reasons do require action, whether they require actions for a particular agent may depend on the agent's epistemic perspective and affective dispositions.⁷²

⁷⁰ I discuss Chang's view in 2.3.

⁷¹ See Dancy (2004), Setiya (2014), Gert (2003),

⁷² See Lord (2018).

The rest of this dissertation will explore this last possibility. To be precise, I will explore a specific way of developing the following real definition:

Perspectivism (Schema): An agent A ought to ϕ , if and only if, and because, agent A possesses decisive reason to ϕ .

We will see that on a plausible way of developing this real definition, we can get an account of practical reasoning and rationality that (a) acknowledges the existence of objective reasons, but also (b) gives agents flexibility in deciding which objective reasons and values will play a role in determining what they ought to do.

1.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I've shown how a recent anti-realist challenge to moral realism is a novel threat that is not just a version of the Open Question Argument. Having considered indirect strategies for undermining the challenge, I've argued that the challenge is best interpreted as a request for the realist to provide a real definition of normative property that is consistent with her commitments and not merely a conceptual or semantic analysis. Given that the anti-realist has not provided an independent argument against the possibility of real definitions, the realist project is alive and well. I've also considered how thinking in terms of real definition can help the anti-realist formulate a form of pragmatism and can also help the realist consider possible concessions to the anti-realist. Finally, even though the anti-realist challenge can be diffused, the realist should think seriously about the truth behind anti-realism. Perhaps there is a role for agents to play in determining which properties are normative and such a role need not violate the spirit of realism.

CHAPTER 2:
THE REASONS MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

The last chapter ended on a reflection of what the anti-realist might have gotten right. The realist view of normative reality is attractive, but its starkest versions have drawbacks. Reality favors certain ways of acting and thinking. There are external reasons and values that exist independently of our contingent desires and practices. At the same time, few of us accept a stark realist view on which reality dictates what we ought to do in every instance or aspect of our lives. For example, there are many different valuable intellectual and aesthetic pursuits that we are permitted to adopt. While Bach's *Mass in B Minor* and Beyoncé's *Lemonade* are objectively valuable and a life without them would be missing out on significant goods, one's life may still be good in virtue of experiencing other comparably fantastic artistic achievements. What we do end up experiencing, however, is often subject to contingent circumstances. Case in point, not everyone is required to be a fan of Bach and Beyoncé like I am. There are also many people we could potentially romantically love. Few of us think that we must continue to trade up or that there is only one person out there we should love.⁷³

What we want is a broadly realist view that is consistent with the idea that we sometimes get to decide what we ought to do. Such a broadly realist view (a) acknowledges

⁷³ I discuss this in detail in the next chapter.

the existence of external reasons, but also (b) gives agents flexibility in deciding which external reasons and values will play a role in determining what they ought to do.⁷⁴

The purpose of this chapter is to argue that Perspectivism can get us a version of the broadly realist view just mentioned. On Perspectivism, facts determine what an agent ought to do only if they are, in a sense to be specified, rationally accessible to the agent. We will take the most comprehensive and developed version of Perspectivism developed by Lord (2018) as our starting point. His version of Perspectivism consists of two theses:⁷⁵

Possessed Reasons: What an agent ought to do is determined by the reasons she possesses.

Possession: What it is for agent A to possess reason R to φ provided by fact F is for A to be in a position to manifest knowledge about how to use R to φ .

I argue that if we accept the above view (or related variants on which what we ought to do is sensitive to our information and reasoning capacities), we can develop a framework – the **Reasons Management Framework** (RMF) – that gives us an attractive account of our normative powers (i.e. our ability to control what we ought to do). The framework adopts the previous two theses and adds the following:

Management: An agent is rationally permitted, in some instances, to control which reasons she possesses by controlling whether she satisfies the conditions for their possession.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In section 2.1, I motivate **Possessed Reasons** by considering arguments made by Lord (2018) and others. In section 2.2, I argue that on

⁷⁴ This chapter will use the idiom of reasons. However, feel free to replace reasons talk with value talk or fittingness talk or whatever normative property or notion you take to be fundamental.

⁷⁵ **Possessed Reasons** is found in (ibid., 223) and **Possession** is found in (ibid., 124).

plausible interpretations of **Possession, Management** is also true. Importantly, the control that we have over what reasons we possess need not be irrational and can itself be done in a way that is responsive to our possessed reasons. I then consider whether we always possess decisive second-order reasons that require us to gather as many first-order reasons as possible. First, I point out that many of the examples discussed in the section can serve as counter-examples to the previous claim. Second, I propose that we should think about the relationship between our first-order reasons and second-order reasons to possess reasons much in the same way as we think about the relationship between first-order moral judgments and moral theories. As a methodological point, I start from the ground up. Just as moral judgments provide data that must be accounted for in moral theorizing, our judgments about the different first-order reasons that people are permitted to possess should be accounted for in any account of our second-order reasons.

In sections 2.3 and 2.4, I consider how RMF can be interpreted as a non-ad hoc account of our normative powers assuming we reject that there always decisive second-order reasons to possess first-order reasons. The strategy is to argue that RMF provides a plausible way of understanding two recent theses in practical reasoning that resist the stark realist view. The first thesis from Chang (2014, 2017) is that even though there are external reasons, we also have the ability to create will-based reasons to resolve choices when options are on a par. The second thesis from Gert (2003) states that there are two distinct ways in which reasons support attitudes. On this distinction, some reasons merely justify action while others can require it. Though I disagree with how Chang and Gert defend their respective theses, I show that RMF can capture what is intuitively attractive about these theses in a way that is both illuminating and more theoretically conservative.

2.1 Motivating Perspectivism

Recall that on Perspectivism, in order for facts to determine what an agent ought to do, they must be, in some sense to be specified, rationally accessible to the agent.⁷⁶ To be clear, this does not commit Perspectivists to reasons existence internalism (i.e. the existence of a reason depends on an agent's motivational states) or motivational internalism (i.e. reasons judgments must actually motivate agents). In this section, I motivate and adopt Lord's version of Perspectivism which neither entails reasons existence internalism or motivational internalism. I follow his discussion in order to highlight the variety of Perspectivist views available. This will be relevant when we discuss how these differences have implications for **Management**.

2.1.1 Motivating Possession

Since Perspectivism as stated in **Possessed Reasons** depends on the notion of possessed reasons, we start with a discussion of **Possession**:

Possession: What it is for agent A to possess reason R to φ provided by fact F is for A to be in a position to manifest knowledge about how to use R to φ .

To understand this rather awkwardly phrased real definition of what it is to possess a reason, we start with the following idea from Lord:⁷⁷

Working Hypothesis: You possess reason r to φ iff r affects the rational merits of φ -ing.

⁷⁶ See Scanlon (2007), McFarlane (2013), Kieswetter (2011, 2018), and Zimmerman (2008) for a representative sample.

⁷⁷ Lord (ibid., 69).

For example, suppose that unbeknownst to you, if you walked into Walmart right now, you'll be their billionth customer. To celebrate this, Walmart will give you a billion dollars. The fact that you'll receive a billion dollars is a weighty objective reason to go to Walmart now. Unfortunately, and intuitively, you don't possess this reason to go to Walmart.

Working Hypothesis gives us a plausible explanation of why we have this intuition. If you don't know this fact (let's also presume that there's nothing reasonable you could have done to know this) it can't affect the rational merit of going to Walmart for you. That's why you don't possess it as a reason to do so. With this in mind, **Possession** attempts to state the conditions that must be met in order for a reason to affect the rational merits of φ -ing for an agent.

While philosophers have already discussed the epistemic condition on reasons possession, Lord has pointed out that there may also be a practical condition on reasons possession on which an agent must know how to use a fact as the normative reason that it is. For example, if you bizarrely thought that a billion dollars was some rare form of skin disease rather than money you can use to further your ends, then you wouldn't take the fact that you'll receive a billion dollars if you go now as a normative reason to do so. The fact, for you, not only fails to raise the rational merit of going to Walmart, it counts against doing so (assuming you want to avoid rare skin diseases).

To set up what is to come, I will follow Lord by discussing reasons possession as consisting of two conditions: the epistemic condition and the practical condition.

2.1.1.1 The Epistemic Condition

For our purposes, there are two decision points for anyone that posits an epistemic condition on reasons possession:⁷⁸

High vs. Low Bar: In order for an agent to possess a fact as a reason, does the epistemic relation that she stands to that fact require a high bar (e.g. knowledge, rational belief, in the position to know, etc.) or a low one (e.g. belief, seeming, etc.)?

Holding vs. Non-holding: In order for an agent to possess a fact as a reason, does the agent have to hold the fact (i.e. believe it) or not (i.e. be merely in the position to believe it)?

Lord holds a high bar non-holding epistemic condition: Possessing P entails being in the position to know P. To get a sense for the view, let's consider each question. First, Schroeder (2007, 2009) has argued that having a mere presentational state of R (a mental state that represents R) is perhaps enough for an agent to meet the epistemic condition on reasons possession. This is a low-bar view. However, one might think that this is not enough. Suppose one has a hallucination with R as its content or forms the belief that R without either doxastic or propositional justification. Presumably being epistemically related to R in these ways would not allow it to raise the rational merit of φ -ing. Instead, in agreement with Lord, it's more plausible to think that an agent must stand in an epistemic relation with a higher bar (e.g. rational belief, knowledge, in the position to know) to a fact in

⁷⁸ See Lord (*ibid.*, 69-70). The third decision point is whether a reason has to be a fact. Though there is some debate in the literature, I will simply assume the factivity of reasons to simplify matters and refer discussion to Lord (*ibid.*, ch. 3). He argues that you can only act because of a reason insofar as it is a fact since because explanations are factive.

order for it to raise the rational merit of one of her attitudes. For our purposes, we will assume a high-bar view.⁷⁹

The second question is more controversial. Lord has argued for a non-holding condition. On his view, one can possess a fact as a reason even if you don't actually believe it. He motivates the view by appealing to cases in which an agent easily could have used a fact in her deliberation if she were paying attention (e.g. suppose one's spouse tells you that she can't pick up the kids, but you were just being absent-minded).⁸⁰ The guiding intuition here seems to be that agents in such cases can still be held responsible if they failed to act on such reasons because they were nevertheless within their epistemic ken (i.e. it would not have taken much additional effort or drastic change in one's epistemic situation to incorporate said reasons in one's practical reasoning if one were paying attention). We don't want to let people off the hook just because they were being inattentive or epistemically negligent.⁸¹

On the other hand, Kiesewetter (2018) has pointed out that a non-holding condition would generate too many possessed reasons. There are too many facts within our epistemic ken. It's impossible for us to possess all such facts as reasons. I won't settle the dispute here. For what it's worth, the notion of epistemic ken is deliberately vague, and the plausibility of the position depends on how it is spelled out. I discuss the implications of these differences for **Management** in section 2.2.

⁷⁹ There is a significant literature on this view that I can't cover here. See Lord (ibid., section 3.4) for extensive discussion. Lord's defense of a high-bar view is also influenced by Williamson's (2000) knowledge-first project.

⁸⁰ See Lord (ibid., 72). The case is called "Out of the Ordinary."

⁸¹ For work on epistemic vigilance and its value, see Murray and Vargas (forthcoming).

2.1.1.2 The Practical Condition

Lord's view is distinctive because he also posits a practical condition on reasons possession. Not only must an agent be in the position to know a fact in order to possess it as a reason, the agent also has to have a certain practical know how. We can illustrate the point with two cases drawn from Lord.⁸²

Fish: Suppose you're considering whether to order fish off the menu. Your friend reminds you of a news report that all fish in the restaurant have been contaminated with salmonella. You mistakenly think that salmonella is some sort of taste enhancer rather than a bacterial infection. You proceed to order the fish. You meet the relevant epistemic condition (assuming the reliability of the news and your friend) because you know there is salmonella in the local fish. But intuitively you don't possess the fact as a reason to avoid salmonella.

Math: You're asked in math class to do a difficult proof for some mathematical conjecture M. Your annoyingly smart classmate gives you a hint that a certain lemma L is all that you need to finish the proof for M. Unfortunately, you have no idea how to use the lemma to finish the proof and end up having to turn in the homework assignment incomplete.

Lord's explanation for these cases is that even though we meet the epistemic condition for reasons possession, there is a further practical condition that we're failing to meet. The practical condition is a certain kind of know how. It is the ability to use a fact as the normative reason that it is. In **Fish**, you don't possess the salmonella fact to avoid ordering the fish because you aren't able to use it as the normative reason it is to avoid ordering the fish. In this case, we can attribute this to your mistaken belief about salmonella. In **Math**, things are a bit different. It's not that you have mistaken beliefs. You may know all of the facts that would a priori entail the truth of conjecture M but still fail to possess them

⁸² See Lord (ibid, 98) for **Fish** and (ibid, 108) for a related mathematical case.

as reasons to believe it. In this case, the failure to possess the lemma L a reason to believe in conjecture M can be attributed to a lack of know how. You lack the inferential know how to reason from the lemma L to conjecture M and to write it down in the form of a mathematical proof.

Admittedly, there is debate as to whether this practical condition can be sketched out on purely epistemic terms (e.g. the agent fails to possess the reason because she fails to have certain normative beliefs about what facts are reason with what weights, lacks beliefs about a priori entailment relations, etc.).⁸³ However, I'm inclined to think that Lord is generally correct.

First, positing additional beliefs about normative reasons or their weights as conditions on reasons possession overintellectualizes matters. Children can possess reasons without having any beliefs about what facts are normative reasons. Instead, the ability required for possession may just involve basic dispositions to be sensitive to normative reasons (e.g. the disposition to reason in accordance with modus ponens/tollens, to form rational desires given facts about what is conducive to human welfare, etc.) rather than explicit beliefs about normative reasons.⁸⁴ These dispositions serve as the background conditions for our ability to manifest knowledge about how to use facts as the normative reasons they are though there might be more specific capacities necessary for possessing

⁸³ See Lord (ibid, ch. 4). Lord appeals to Lewis Carroll's observation that reasoning with modus ponens can't involve the citation of modus ponens as an explicit premise (ibid., 115). If so, we'll get an infinite regress. Modus ponens serves as the background logical rule that we are disposed to follow when forming arguments.

⁸⁴ For related views on which reasons are premises in good patterns of practical reasoning, see Setiya (2007) and Asarnow (2017). Note however that Setiya does not relativize patterns of practical reasoning to agents – reasons are premises in objectively good patterns of practical reasoning regardless of whether the particular agent reasons in accordance with such patterns. Asarnow, on the other hand, is willing to relativize reasons to an agent's actual patterns of reasoning.

certain reasons (e.g. sophisticated mathematical reasoning, aesthetic and moral appreciation etc.) that we'll discuss in section 2.2.

Second, in some cases, even when an agent has all of the explicit beliefs that the denier of the practical condition might want, the agent may still fail to possess a reason. Lord gives the example of an ethics professor who believes the correct moral view (suppose it's the Kantian view that we ought to treat others as ends in themselves). Despite the ethicist's propositional knowledge, she nonetheless lacks the affective dispositions that would poise her to act compassionately towards a struggling waiter on his first day of work.⁸⁵ Note that the above example (and Lord's perspectivism) does not entail reasons existence or motivational internalism. First, Lord's Perspectivism is perfectly compatible with the thesis that facts can be reasons independent of the affective states of agents. Thus, it does not entail reasons existence internalism. Second, it also does not entail motivational internalism. An agent may possess a reason but simply fail to be motivated by it because she is absent-minded. Furthermore, the fact that the waiter is struggling is a reason to be compassionate regardless of whether the Kantian professor is capable of being motivated to act. The problem with the Kantian professor is that he fails to possess the reason because he lacks the capability to be motivated by this consideration to act.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ (ibid., 109)

⁸⁶ You might worry that once we combine this with **Possessed Reasons**, this means that because the Kantian professor fails to possess the reason, it can't determine what he ought to do. I return to this example in the next chapter. First, I suspect that actual Kantian professors will have the relevant dispositions to be compassionate towards the waiter and thus possess the relevant reasons. They're just failing to respond to these reasons by failing to manifest those dispositions. Second, if the Kantian professor lacks strong dispositions to be compassionate, then he may fail to possess the relevant reasons at this point but may nonetheless come to possess such reasons if he were to develop those dispositions. He may have independent reasons to do so or those around her may help him strengthen these dispositions. I discuss this in the next chapter. Third, if the Kantian professor actually lacks affective dispositions altogether, then this is more like a case of an amoral

Finally, though I've followed Lord in splitting the discussion of reasons possession in terms of epistemic and practical conditions, Lord actually sees the two conditions as unified into one condition. That is why we get the rather awkwardly phrased formulation:

Possession: What it is for agent A to possess reason R to φ provided by fact F is for A to be in a position to manifest knowledge about how to use R to φ .

2.1.2 Motivating Possessed Reasons

Let's now consider:

Possessed Reasons: What an agent ought to do is determined by the reasons she possesses.⁸⁷

Why think that something like **Possessed Reasons** is true rather than an objectivist view on which what we ought to do is just determined by all the facts (i.e. what we ought to do is independent of what information is available to us and whether we are able to use it in our practical deliberation)?

The key arguments in favor of Perspectivism are closely related to the arguments for **Possession**.⁸⁸ The general idea is that in order for reasons to determine what you ought to

psychopath. I'm willing to claim that such individuals are unable to possess most moral reasons and may thus not be held to the same standard of moral responsibility.

⁸⁷ This thesis is synchronic. I consider diachronic versions of the thesis in the next chapter when I address the possibility of moral rationalization.

⁸⁸ Here is an abbreviated argument given by Kiesewetter (2018) against objectivism that appeals to a counterexample. Suppose Jill is a doctor administering drugs to a patient. Drug A will alleviate most of the illness but will leave some minor side effects. There is also Drug B and Drug C. One of them will completely cure the patient and the other would kill the patient. Jill does not know which one does what. Here's the argument:

- (1) It is rationally possible for a person in Jill's circumstances to make a responsible decision (administer drug A) while deliberating in accordance with the correct theory of reasons.
- (2) It is not rationally possible for a person in Jill's circumstances to make a responsible decision while deliberating in accordance with pure objectivism.

do, they have to be available to you in practical deliberation such that you can use them to rationally act. Lord appeals to this idea in the following argument:⁸⁹

- (1) If the reasons in some set S make it the case you ought to φ , then you can φ because of the members of S.
- (2) If you can φ because of the members of S, then you possess the members of S.
- (3) If the reasons in some set S make it the case you ought to φ , then you possess the members of S.

The “because” in (1) is crucial. It states a basing requirement such that if a set of reasons makes it the case that an agent ought to φ , then there has to be a rational route that we can credit the agent for taking from that set of reasons to the conclusion that she ought to φ . Lord motivates (1) with two cases:⁹⁰

Delusional Andy: Andy knows that his wife has always been an extremely loyal person. He also knows that he has no reason to think that she is cheating on him. Despite this knowledge, he does believe that she is cheating on him. He thus moves out and files for divorce. In fact, his wife is cheating on him.

Surprised Andy: Andy knows that his wife has always been an extremely loyal person. However, much to his surprise, he learns that she is cheating on him—her best friend tells him, he finds some love letters, and he catches his wife with her lover. He thus moves out and files for divorce.

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- (3) Therefore, pure objectivism is not the correct theory of reasons.

The motivation for (2) stems from pure objectivism and the enkratic principle. Pure objectivism predicts that Jill shouldn't administer Drug A. Instead she should choose either B or C because one of them would produce the best results. If Jill deliberates in accordance with objectivism, she will believe that she ought not to administer A. The enkratic principle tells us that it is not rationally possible for an agent to choose an option that she believes she ought not to choose. Thus, the enkratic principle when combined with objectivism entails (2).

⁸⁹ See Lord (ibid., 232).

⁹⁰ See Lord (ibid., 231).

The fact that Surprised Andy's wife is cheating on him is an objective reason for Surprised Andy to believe she is disloyal. The fact that Delusional Andy's wife is cheating on him is an objective reason for Delusional Andy to believe his wife is disloyal. However, while Surprised Andy ought to believe his wife is disloyal, Delusional Andy ought not believe his wife is disloyal.

So, what's the difference that makes the difference? (2) gives us the answer. A fact can make it rational for you to form a conclusion only if it is a reason that you possess. Only such reasons can affect the rational merit of your attitudes in virtue of being reasons that you can deliberate with to the proper conclusion. Surprised Andy possesses the fact as a reason because he stands in the right epistemic and practical relation to it. He knows it and can reason with it to the conclusion that his wife is disloyal. This is not so for Delusional Andy. Delusional Andy has no reason to believe his wife is cheating on him even though she is. He does not possess the fact as a reason to believe anything. His belief that his wife is disloyal is irrational given that there is no rational route to this conclusion available from the reasons he actually possesses. To form this belief on the basis of the reasons he actually possesses would be a lucky guess at best.⁹¹

Given (1) and (2), we get the necessary condition that a set of reasons can determine what you ought to do only if you possess them. For the purpose of discussing reasons

⁹¹ Though I've put the case epistemically, we can think of it as a case of practical reasoning where the fact that Andy's wife is cheating on him is a weighty reason to get a divorce. That said, for additional arguments for *epistemic* perspectivism, see McHugh and Way (2017).

management and vindicating Perspectivism, we won't need to establish the sufficient condition.⁹²⁹³

To summarize, I've motivated two theses by following the work of Lord (2018):

Possession and **Possessed Reasons**. **Possessed Reasons** is the most generic form of Perspectivism: what we ought to do is determined by our possessed reasons. The view becomes more specific once we provide an account of what it is to possess a reason.

Possession provides us with one such account and thus gives us a fleshed-out version of Perspectivism. In discussing **Possession**, we've also considered a number of decision points on which views of possessed reasons may differ. We'll now consider how some of these difference get reflected in an account of reasons management.

2.2 Controlling the Reasons We Possess

Granting that what we ought to do is determined by our possessed reasons, can we control what reasons we possess? The section starts a preliminary defense of the following positive answer:

⁹² Following Lord (ibid., 238-240), we can just build in any additional sufficient conditions into the account of reasons possession. Furthermore, for the purpose of discussing **Management**, if reasons determine what an agent ought to do only if they are possessed, then changing what reasons we possess will change what we ought to do.

⁹³ The objectivist might respond by pointing out there are simply different notions of ought. However, it's unclear how this is a response to the perspectivist. First, both sides presumably take it that there is an interesting notion of ought that is the core notion for our moral theorizing, deliberation, and attributions of credit and blame. Case in point, McPherson (2018) has argued that here is a notion of authoritative ought that is the subject of our practical deliberation. Second, perspectivists such as McFarlane (2013) point out that rather than having different notions of ought, there is just one notion. However, on McFarlane's relativist account, ought truths are relativized to the speaker's context of assessment which is dependent on what the speaker knows. The deliberative ought is just the one in which the speaker is also the one deciding what to do.

Management: An agent is rationally permitted, in some instances, to control which reasons she possesses by controlling whether she satisfies the conditions for their possession.

Given what we've said about both the epistemic and practical conditions on reasons possession, the default presumption should be that we *can* control whether we satisfy these conditions. Note that this section provides a *preliminary* defense of **Management**. After motivating the default presumption, I then address the worry that we all possess decisive second-order reasons to gather as many first-order reasons as possible.

To frame the discussion, if **Management** is true, then there has to be cases in which we are rationally permitted to possess a reason or fail to possess it. A helpful way to think about it is in terms of the following distinction about what reasons we “must” possess. We can understand this “must” either probabilistically or normatively:

Must₁: The agent must possess some reason R because given the possession conditions for R, it is highly likely that the agent will possess R.

Must₂: The agent must possess some reason R because the norms on reasons possession (or higher-order reasons) require that the agent possess R.

As an example of *must₁*, an agent is highly likely to possess her own pain or predicted future pain as a reason to avoid or do certain actions. In the case of present pain, she has immediate access to it. Furthermore, most agents are able to form a rational desire to take or avoid actions that address this pain once they experience it. Or consider an agent under good lighting conditions confronted with a tree in front of her. She is highly likely to possess her perception of the tree as a decisive reason to believe there is a tree in front of her. However, it usually won't be the case that such an agent *must₂* possess this perceptual

evidence as a decisive reason to believe there is a tree in front of her. Agents aren't required to always open their eyes or pay attention to their surroundings.

As an example of must_2 , the honor code at an undergraduate student's college must figure in determining what she ought to do because her duties as a student requires that she possess the honor code's directives as reasons to avoid cheating, cite properly, etc. However, it need not be true that she must_1 possess features of the honor code as reasons. Perhaps the honor code is confusing or hidden in some obscure room (more plausibly hard to find on the university's website). Or, perhaps the situation is more sinister. The student has taken steps to become willfully ignorant of the honor code in order to avoid blameworthiness for cheating. I discuss these cases in the next chapter)⁹⁴

With the distinction on board, I'll now argue that when it comes to a variety of reasons associated with our personal lives (e.g. intellectual and aesthetic interests, romantic relationships etc.), it's usually not the case that we must (in either sense) possess certain reasons. To make things easier, we'll break up our discussion by first discussing the epistemic condition and then the practical condition on reasons possession.⁹⁵

2.2.1 The Epistemic Condition

The most likely challenge to **Management** is that the epistemic condition on reasons possession is non-holding (i.e. you don't have to believe a fact to possess it). I'll now argue that on either a non-holding or a holding version of the epistemic condition, agents

⁹⁴ There are applications to the notion of plausible deniability that are worth further discussion that I won't address here.

⁹⁵ This allows me to make a case for **Management** even if you don't think there is a practical condition on reasons possession.

have significant rational control over their possessed reasons because it's usually not the case that agents must (in either sense) stand in an epistemic relation to any particular fact.⁹⁶

Let's start with Lord's non-holding version: being in the position to know. I've expressed worries that a non-holding condition entails that we possess too many reasons. For example, given access to the internet, we're in the position to know any number of facts. But it can't be the case that we possess every single fact on the internet as a reason for action. If we sketch out "being in the position to know" this generously, then there might be very little control over what reasons we possess. **Management** is false.

The first response is to point out that Lord does not merely posit an epistemic condition. On **Possession**, one must also know how to use the fact as the reason that it is. As we'll see in the next subsection, the development of specific capacities to use fact as the reasons that they are is plausibly up to our control – it's neither the case that we must (in either sense) develop any particular capacity.⁹⁷

The second response is to consider what Lord actually says is required to be in the position to know:⁹⁸

In cases like this, what is it in virtue of which you are in a position to know p? In the inferential cases, it's the fact that you have some beliefs with contents such that, if you could and did attend to those contents and inferentially form a belief that p in the right way, you would know that p. In the uninferential (*sic*) cases, it's the fact that you have some experiences such that, if you could and did attend to

⁹⁶ Recall that I'm assuming the epistemic condition must satisfy a high bar.

⁹⁷ Lord has to engage in a balancing act. The motivation for Perspectivism is that there has to be restrictions on what facts determine what an agent ought to do. Perspectivism sets limits by pointing out that only the facts that an agent possesses as reasons can determine what she ought to do. However, if Lord makes the possession condition too weak, then we will possess too many reasons – which undermines the motivation for Perspectivism.

⁹⁸ Lord (*ibid.*, 92).

certain features of those experiences and uninferentially form a belief that *p* in the right kind of way, then you would know that *p*.

Let's focus on the non-inferential cases. If being in a position to know depends on having certain experiences, then note that we have significant control over the reasons we possess by choosing what experiences to have or not to have. Of course, this control has limits. Sometimes, we're just confronted with an experience which provides us with reasons that we must₁ possess (e.g. your spouse shouts at you to ensure that you pick up the kids). We may also be required in some cases to have certain experiences because we must₂ possess the reasons that are provided by those experiences (e.g. you can't watch Netflix while on duty as a life guard). Nonetheless, when it comes to a variety of aesthetic and intellectual interests, agents are typically free to pursue experiences as they wish. For example, if I took time to watch the *Bachelor*, then maybe I'll come to possess reasons to believe that it has artistic merits along with other reality T.V. shows. Even so, though I might possess reasons to have a broad range of aesthetic experiences, it's unlikely that I possess a reason to watch the *Bachelor* in particular. Even if I do, it may easily be outweighed. Thus, it's not the case that I must (in either sense) possess reasons to believe it has artistic merits.⁹⁹ We'll consider some plausible restrictions later in this section. For now, the default presumption is that the extent to which we can choose which experiences we have is quite extensive. Thus, our control over which facts we are in the position to know and thus which facts we possess as reasons may also be quite extensive. This presumption holds at least in the case of our intellectual and aesthetic interests, and, as I'll develop in the last chapter, our romantic lives.

⁹⁹ Of course, if a reliable source told me so, then I will. The idea that we can alter each other's possessed reasons through sharing information is key to my defense of RMF in the next chapter.

Now let's consider Kieseewetter's holding version of the epistemic condition: knowledge. We've just shown that even a non-holding epistemic constraint is compatible with **Management**. An even stronger case for **Management** can be made if we adopt knowledge as the epistemic condition for reasons possession. This is because we have significant control over what we know. While a sizeable portion of what we know is delivered to us through automatic and effortless processes (e.g. our perceptions, inferential knowledge), in many cases, the knowledge that is relevant to our decision making requires effort to gather. This fact leads to two observations that support **Management**.

First, even if what we ought to know is a function of our evidence, note that evidence gathering is itself an activity subject to our control.¹⁰⁰ As Buchak (2014) has pointed out, it's not always the case that evidence is readily available. We have to act on the world to get it. In some cases, we have decisive reason to seek out more evidence (e.g. an investigator should seek corroborating evidence if her source is known to be unreliable). However, there are also cases where there's significant latitude as to whether we should gather more evidence. This is especially the case when there are significant opportunity costs that count against gathering additional evidence. There are also cases in which it is rational for us not to seek further evidence *even if* it is readily available. Buchak (2014) has argued that on risk sensitive expected utility theory, even if evidence is readily available, it may still be rational for you to refrain from gathering it because you can rationally assign a high level of risk

¹⁰⁰ Some philosophers also seem to think that our beliefs are also subject to our control. Sosa (2016) for an account of knowledge (especially reflective knowledge) that appeals to epistemic agency. Also see Roeber (forthcoming) for a defense of limited doxastic voluntarism.

aversion against being misled and gathering more evidence is strictly worse for you because it will lower your risk sensitive expected utility.¹⁰¹

Second, we should also reflect on the question of what we ought to know.¹⁰² It may be true that in order to be effective agents, we are required to know general facts about the world, to process perceptual information properly, to conditionalize on evidence, and maybe even be generally curious. However, whether or not someone ought to know Quine's arguments for holism depends on whether the person in question has chosen to be a philosopher. This is because truths about what we ought to know are frequently derived from instrumental claims about what kind of knowledge is required in order to fulfill a voluntarily adopted practical role.¹⁰³ College students ought to know the honor code because they've volunteered (in most cases) to be college students which requires them to abide by the honor code. Doctors ought to have the latest medical knowledge in their sub disciplines because this knowledge is required for them to continue their practice effectively. Insofar as these practical roles are up to us, truths about what we ought to know will also be up to us.

2.2.2 The Practical Condition

Focusing on the epistemic condition alone, we have significant rationally permissible control over what we are in the position to know, what we know, and what we ought to know. The case may even be stronger if we accept a practical condition on reasons

¹⁰¹ On the assumption that various forms of risk aversion are rational, then agents can control whether to collect additional evidence in virtue of controlling the risk they assign in their risk sensitive expected utility calculations. That said, some may doubt that any form of risk aversion is rational. Campbell-Moore and Salow (manuscript) have developed similar results. For a concrete example and discussion of whether this leads to an impermissible form of epistemic self-binding, see Buchak (2014). Her answer is no.

¹⁰² For illuminating discussion, see Hunter (2018).

¹⁰³ I consider whether there are involuntarily adopted practical roles in section 3.2.

possession: one must be able to use the fact as a normative reason in one's practical deliberation in order to possess it. We can see this with two examples.

Consider the following case:

Rothko Exhibit: Your art historian colleague tells you that you have to go to the Rothko exhibit. Though you're curious, you don't know much about art history, let alone anything about abstract expressionism. You google some of his paintings and remain relatively unimpressed. All you see are rather low-resolution patches of muted colors on what seems to be a wall or canvas. You have no idea why your art historian friend is so obsessed with Rothko.

In this case, maybe your art historian colleague provides you with reasons to go to the exhibit. But intuitively you don't possess reasons to actually *appreciate* Rothko's work. You don't possess the qualities of the painting as reasons to appreciate it.

We can explain what is going on by recalling Lord's claim that possession requires a certain know-how: the ability to use a fact as the reason it is. The case of aesthetic appreciation is interesting in two respects. First, certain kinds of aesthetic appreciation may require being in contact with the relevant piece of art. You have to see the features of the painting for yourself (e.g. the texture of the canvas and the paint, the subtlety in shading, its massive size, the contrast of colors etc.) in order to be able to have the full range of affective and cognitive responses appropriate to the painting. Second, aesthetic appreciation may require a specific capacity to recognize the artistic features of a work as reasons to appreciate it. The art historian knows how difficult it is to execute, how the techniques were innovative within the context of the era, etc.¹⁰⁴ For intellectualists about know-how, perhaps this ability

¹⁰⁴ For example, you might think that Jackson Pollock paintings are just splotches of paint thrown on a canvas. However, art experts can easily differentiate a genuine Pollock from fake ones. You wouldn't be able to create a convincing forgery by attempting to throw splotches of paint on a canvas unless you know how to "act paint". See <https://video.wired.com/watch/anatomy-of-a-fake>.

can be understood as having additional propositional knowledge. If this is so, then the preceding points about controlling what we know will apply here. However, I suspect that propositional knowledge might not be enough. Perhaps it's possible for someone to have all of the relevant perceptions and historical knowledge but still fail to appreciate the painting with the proper affective and cognitive responses.

What does any of this have to do with **Management**? We're not all required to be art historians with this kind of knowledge. Lacking an artistic sensibility isn't the worse thing in the world.¹⁰⁵ I propose that however we wish to flesh out the practical condition for reasons possession, we are not all required to develop fine-grained capacities like the ability to appreciate visual art. For example, I can tell when to play behind a conductor's beat and to distinguish the sound of an English horn from an oboe. This is an ability that I must have as a bass player in an orchestra, but you need not have this ability. The same may apply for a wide variety of abilities that are associated with intellectual and aesthetic pursuits. Insofar as we are free to adopt different specialized capacities to respond to reasons, we will possess different reasons to pursue different projects. How we came across these reasons in the first place may itself be a matter of luck. I recognize that carpentry is valuable, and you can recognize being a musician as valuable, but neither of us have to adopt each other's pursuits. I'm glad that you were introduced to carpentry and I'm glad that my grand uncle introduced me to classical music.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Perhaps there are aesthetic analogues to the amoralist.

¹⁰⁶ For further discussion of the aesthetic case, see Lord (forthcoming).

The case for **Management** is trickier when we think about capacities to possess moral reasons. Consider the following true story:¹⁰⁷

Parental Insight: I work with kids from a neighborhood housing project and occasionally bring them to church after receiving permission from their parents. One time, I brought a boy who kept on fidgeting and insisted on getting a snack during the worship service. I told him I didn't have a snack and to wait until Sunday school. Jenny, a parent at the church, saw the situation and asked the boy whether he had breakfast. He answered no. She immediately gave the boy a sandwich and he calmed down and stopped fidgeting.

Jenny and I knew the same facts. However, Jenny (as a parent, nurse, and someone who has worked with those who frequently went hungry) was able to pick up the signs immediately and knew the boy's complaints weren't to be dismissed. She was able to pick up on the boy's behavior as a normative reason to first ask whether the boy had eaten and then to give him something to eat. On the other hand, I just saw the boy as acting out and being rather impatient at the prospect of snack time (which, in my defense, is common). Arguably, Jenny has a specific practical ability to recognize and respond to moral reasons (e.g. facts about the boy's behavior) in this case that I didn't. She knew what questions to ask and what needed to be done to address the boy's needs.

Reflecting on this experience, sometimes I feel guilty (the reader is free to pass the same judgment). Nonetheless, I think some grace may be called for. Though I'm pretty good with kids, I'm not a parent. I didn't have the relevant know how to ask the right questions and to address the boy's needs. All the facts were there, but it took the right person with the

¹⁰⁷ For additional work on the importance of moral appreciation and acting on the basis of the fact that an action is right, see Coetsee (forthcoming), Johnson-King (forthcoming), Callahan (forthcoming), and Lord (forthcoming).

right know how to reason to the proper conclusion.¹⁰⁸ I wasn't that person. On critical reflection, there was no deliberative route that I could have taken to the conclusion that the boy needed food immediately. If this is correct, then I did not possess his behavior as a decisive reason to give him food. His behavior didn't play a role in determining that I ought to have given him food.

What does this personal admission have to do with **Management**? Two things. First, much of what I had to say about reasons management focused on aesthetic and intellectual pursuits where most of us are inclined to think we are free to either instantiate or fail to instantiate the conditions for reasons possession in those cases. However, the moral case may be different. Even though I failed to possess the boy's behavior as a reason to ask further questions and to give him food, perhaps I must₂ have possessed those reasons given my responsibilities that day as a caretaker.

This brings up a second issue that will be discussed in the next chapter. Is there a generic role that all agents have (e.g. being a moral agent), that entails that all of us are required to possess capacities to respond moral reasons like the ones that Jenny has? If so, then perhaps I am blameworthy not because I failed to possess the relevant reasons when

¹⁰⁸ There's theoretical backing for this claim from an intellectualist view about practical perception. Bengson (2016) has argued that perception can immediately poise one to act insofar as the perception contains actionable concepts in its content whose very natures poises agents who possess them to act under the right conditions. This (Iris) Murdochian account (i.e. proper vision/description entails correct action) has two key theses:

[1] A concept C is actionable iff_{def}: one understands C only if one is thereby poised to perform certain actions in certain conditions (ibid., 40).

[2] Conceptualism about Practical Perception: x's perception gives rise directly to x's intelligently Φ -ing because: x's perception, a sensory presentation, is a conceptual perception involving a relevant actionable concept C, understood by x, in the enactment conditions for C (where C is relevant just in case understanding it poises one to Φ) (ibid., 42).

Parental Insight happened, but rather I'm blameworthy for not developing parental insight in the first place! To foreshadow the next chapter, I don't think that all of us are required to possess parental insight or the ability to respond to all kinds of moral reasons. Instead, I think the best approach is to recognize that as social creatures, the best way for us to respond to moral reasons collectively is to rely on each other's abilities to address our own moral blind spots.

2.2.3 Second-Order Reasons, Generalizing, and Methodology

Given the preceding point, one might point out that **Management** is true only if we do not possess decisive second-order reasons to gather as many first-order reasons as possible. However, one might object by claiming the following:

Second Order Reasons We *do* possess decisive second-order reasons to gather as many first-order reasons as possible.

If there are normative reasons, then our goal as practical deliberators is to possess as many of them as possible. Perhaps this seems plausible in the case of moral reasons (to be discussed in the next chapter). For now, I want to resist the temptation to posit such second-order reasons in the case of our personal pursuits. I make two points. First, **Second Order Reasons** requires substantive defense which has not yet been provided. In addition, after a general overview of the cases we've just examined, it's implausible that **Second Order Reasons** applies to said cases. Second, allow me to make a methodological point. Some philosophers have a top down mentality. They start with a substantive ethical theory (e.g. consequentialism combined with a certain theory of well-being) and use it to make first order

moral judgments (e.g. killing infants is generally permissible).¹⁰⁹ I start from the bottom up. Just as our first order moral judgments provide data that should be taken seriously in systematic moral theorizing, our judgments about the first order reasons that we are permitted or required to possess should be accounted for in our theorizing about second order reasons.¹¹⁰

Let's take up the first point. **Second Order Reasons** is a substantive claim that requires defense. I'm not aware of any arguments in the literature for such a position (probably because it's not antecedently plausible). One could motivate it by claiming that as epistemic/moral/practical agents, we possess second-order reasons to have a generally accurate understanding of the world, to possess moral reasons to help others, and to know what is required to effectively pursue one's projects and to execute one's duties. But even assuming that (a) there are such second order reasons and (b) all agents possess them; this would not be enough to generate **Second Order Reasons** which is a much stronger claim.

To see why, let's reexamine **Math**, **Rothko**, and **Parental Insight**. In **Math**, there is a lemma L that is a decisive reason to believe mathematical conjecture M. In **Rothko**, the aesthetic features of a Rothko painting make appreciating it fitting. In **Parental Insight**, the behavior of the boy is a reason to ask whether he was hungry and to give him food. In each case, there is a normative reason that favors an action or attitude, but the agent is unable to use it to reason to the proper conclusion. **Math** requires a specialized inferential ability that requires natural talent or years of training. **Rothko** requires both acquaintance of the

¹⁰⁹ See McMahan (2001).

¹¹⁰ I owe Meghan Sullivan for this suggestion. Of course, I don't think first-order considerations always take priority. I just stress that they must be taken seriously.

painting's features and a refined aesthetic sensibility.¹¹¹ **Parental Insight** requires being familiar with the needs of children and their psychologies.

The practical reasoning literature often focuses on cases where it's obvious that agents possess the relevant reasons (e.g. there is beer in the fridge, there is dancing at the party etc.) if they had some desire and knew some fact that can be relayed through testimony. While these cases are great for illustrating what practical reasons are and how they can be possessed, they mask the fact that it can take hard work to possess certain reasons. If the possession of reasons were always this easy, then **Second Order Reasons** is perhaps plausible. But note that people differ in their ability to respond to reasons. In some cases, some people are just better at responding to certain reasons without much effort (e.g. the annoyingly good mathematics student). In other cases, the increased capacity to respond to reasons takes effort and extensive experience (e.g. Jenny, the art historian). **Math, Rothko,** and **Parental Insight** are just three examples of how reasons possession can require extensive experience and skill. Having highlighted the general pattern, the reader can develop examples of her own.

What I've already pointed out (though it is worth stressing again) is that even if there are second-order reasons to possess first-order reasons, these reasons must be balanced against the fact that we are finite agents with limited cognitive, emotional, and physical abilities. It's certainly valuable to be mathematically astute, a competent appreciator of good art, and good with kids. However, general reasons to understand the world, respond to moral reasons, and to be effective agents will not generate requirements to develop the

¹¹¹ To be honest, I'm not a huge Rothko fan but this may change if I saw it in person. Insert whatever visual art you like.

specific skills needed to respond to aesthetic, mathematical, and parental reasons. We may be required to be decent at math, appreciate art, and be decent with kids, but we aren't required to be mathematicians, art historians, or parents (or all three at once). What specific reason-possessing capacities we are required to have, given our finite limitations, will usually be derived from the practical roles that we voluntarily adopt. Furthermore, these practical roles may themselves be chosen based on contingent circumstances.¹¹² I'm a bass player because I was introduced to classical music relatively early, have good relative pitch because I speak a tonal language (Cantonese), and had a great middle school orchestra teacher. These circumstances put me in a good position to possess reasons to become a musician. Things would have been very different if I were tone deaf or had a garbage music teacher.

Now for the second point. Even if there is an ingenious theoretical argument for **Second Order Reasons**, we should be skeptical. In ethics, I am more confident that it is generally impermissible to kill an infant than in the truth of the conjunction of consequentialism and an interest-based welfare theory (which seems to make killing infants generally permissible). Likewise, I think we should be far more confident that we are permitted to manage the reasons we possess (at least in our personal lives) than the claim that we always possess decisive second-order reasons to acquire as many first-order reasons as possible.

What I will point out in the next two sections is that RMF provides a much more plausible way of accommodating the broadly realist picture of practical reasoning discussed at the beginning of this chapter than two recent proposals that do not appeal to RMF. If we

¹¹² I say more about practical roles in 3.2.

accept **Second Order Reasons**, then we cannot appeal to RMF in order to get the intuitive result that normative reality guides our thinking and theorizing without requiring us to adopt specific personal pursuits. Perhaps some other argument that does not appeal to RMF can achieve the same results. Nonetheless, the next two sections develop a positive case for RMF that puts pressure against adopting **Second Order Reasons**. The proof is in the pudding.

2.3 Hard Choices

I've sketched out the preliminary case for **Management**. I'll now continue with the positive case for **Management**. In these next two sections, I continue the positive case for **Management** (and thus RMF) by showing what it can do. I argue that it can help us understand two theses that have been proposed in order to resist the stark realist view considered at the beginning of this chapter. The first thesis is that we have the ability to generate will-based reasons when we confront hard choices where reasons are on a par. The second thesis is that there is a distinction between the justifying and requiring strength of reasons which can help us make sense of options and permissions. I argue that RMF can accommodate versions of these theses and provide a better theoretical support for them than the ones provided by Chang and Gert which carry significant disadvantages. We turn now to the first thesis.

Chang has recently made two general claims regarding paradigmatic hard choices (hard choices that don't just involve ignorance or incomparability). First, hard choices are hard in virtue of facts about the nature of value (or value-based reasons). Second, hard

choices are cases in which we can exercise our agency by controlling what we ought to do. I accept these two claims but disagree with Chang's specific versions of them:¹¹³

Hard Choices are Parity Cases: Paradigmatic hard choices are hard because options are on a par with respect to the covering value used to compare them.

Will-Based Reasons in Parity Cases: We have the power to create will-based reasons if and only if, and because, we are in a case where values are on a par.

I argue that if the Perspectivist adopts RMF, she can account for Chang's general claims about hard choices without adopting Chang's specific claims which involve controversial metaphysical commitments concerning parity and the source of normativity.

2.3.1 Are Hard Choices Parity Cases?

2.3.1.1 Chang's Diagnosis

Chang argues that paradigmatic hard choices are hard in virtue of the fact that options in these choices are on a par with respect to a covering value.¹¹⁴ According to Chang, when two options are on a par in this way, the options are neither better than each other nor equal with respect to that value. Instead, when two options are on a par, there is a

¹¹³ See Chang (2017). The first three sections of the paper rule out several non-parity explanations of hard choices. Section four defends the first thesis. Chang does not provide explicit arguments for the second thesis but does explicitly state it:

Parity is special *because* it is the relation that allows us to make it true, through an exclusive exercise of our normative powers, that we have most all-things-considered reasons to do one thing rather than another. It is the point at which we come into our own as self-governing agents (*italics are my emphasis*, 19).

¹¹⁴ In agreement with Chang, not all choices are hard because we lack information. Nor are they hard because options are incomparable (just plump) or incommensurable (can still be ranked ordinally) or the values are exactly equal (just pick). See sections one to three of Chang (*ibid.*).

non-zero magnitude evaluative difference between the two options without bias favoring one over the other.

To illustrate with Chang's example, suppose we are comparing a refreshing lemon sorbet and a warm slice of apple pie on the following covering value: goodness as a dessert.¹¹⁵ The sorbet produces a short but intense pleasure with its tartness. The warm apple pie produces a longer soothing pleasure. Though there are genuine evaluative differences between the desserts, these differences, according to Chang, don't tip (bias) one option over the other in terms of overall goodness as a dessert.

In typical parity cases, options are compared along complex covering values determined by multiple value components. Each option may excel at some such components but not others. Thus, it's possible that there are genuine non-zero evaluative differences between the options along these components. Despite the evaluative differences between options, such differences may nonetheless fail to generate a bias towards either option. For Chang, our 'given reasons' run out in such cases.¹¹⁶ There is nothing in the external world of value or reasons that will decide for us which option is better with respect to a covering value. We have to step in. That's what makes choice in parity cases hard.

¹¹⁵ See Chang (ibid., 12-13).

¹¹⁶ On Chang's view, given reasons can involve value-based reasons along with reasons whose grounds depend on our conative states (e.g. desires).

2.3.1.2 A Reasons Management Approach

While I agree with Chang that paradigmatic hard choices are hard due to facts about values or reasons, we can provide a more illuminating picture of why choices are hard without appealing to parity if we adopt RMF.

The problem with Chang's diagnosis is that it makes implausible predictions about nearby non-parity cases. Presumably, on Chang's account, if we found out that one option was in fact just slightly better overall, the choice would no longer be difficult.¹¹⁷ There might be other non-rational explanations for why the choice is hard, but from a rational standpoint, the choice is easy: just choose the better option. For example, suppose that even though there are non-zero evaluative differences between being an engineer and an artist, it turns out that being an engineer is just slightly better as a career. Chang would predict that we should choose engineering. There is nothing from the rational standpoint that would make the choice hard. But this seems implausible: finding out that the engineering career is slightly better shouldn't suddenly make the choice easier from the rational standpoint. Chang is right to point out that hard choices are difficult in virtue of something about the structure of reasons in such cases. However, parity isn't what is doing the explanatory work.

Instead, if we think about paradigmatic hard choices using RMF, we can make plausible predictions as to why choices are hard even if we know one option is slightly better than the other. It can also help us understand other ways in which choices are hard that don't appeal to parity, ignorance, or incomparability.

¹¹⁷ The only way to block this point is to argue that it can't be the case that one career can be better than the other. This is implausible.

Hard choices are hard in virtue of how we possess reasons and the norms (higher-order reasons) that govern reasons possession. In hard choices, the reasons we possess when making the choice can fluctuate. We are in the position to make any particular option rationally choiceworthy in virtue of how we manage our possessed reasons. Here's why. There are cases in which we have significant freedom as to how we can manage our reasons. This is especially so when we consider a typically non-moral case such as a career choice between engineering or being an artist. In order to possess reasons for these options, an agent may have to gain specific abilities or experiences. For example, unless you've had significant experience with an artistic or engineering life, you may have no idea how the demands of such a life would contribute to your well-being, the well-being of others, and how such a life would interact with your other goals. Thus, you may fail to possess them as reasons you can employ in your practical deliberation.

Now let's suppose that given your possessed reasons, you know that the careers are about equal or that one is slightly better than the other. Now notice the following. Suppose you start investigating engineering more closely. In virtue of the additional knowledge and experience you have of that career, you could possess more reasons to be an engineer over being an artist. However, if you investigated the artistic life, you could have easily possessed more reasons to become an artist instead. In cases where there are no norms governing what we ought to investigate or what reasons we ought to possess, we are left without a guide as to what reasons we should possess as the basis for our choice.

Pace Chang, our reasons don't 'run out'. Instead, paradigmatic hard choices are hard because we (i) possess reasons to choose either option even though neither option is clearly favored, (ii) know that if we were to choose any arbitrary option, we would eventually possess even more reasons to choose that option, (iii) recognize that there are no norms

(higher-order reasons) governing how we should manage our first-order reasons when considering the relevant options, and (iv) have sufficient time to make such a choice such that appealing to a randomized decision procedure would be inappropriate. Learning that options are no longer on a par in a hard choice won't make it any easier because (i)-(iv) still obtains.¹¹⁸

Given what I've said about the career choice, note that RMF can be easily extended to address the difficulty of non-parity choices involving transformative experiences.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, the explanation involves more than just ignorance. Preference reflection principles are often a useful tool for future planning. According to these principles, if you believe you'll have a certain set of preferences in the future, you're advised to have them now assuming that you (i) have all of the relevant information now or (ii) know that you will not lose information or become irrational.¹²⁰ But in choices involving 'transformative experiences', we can't use preference reflection principles to plan for our future because the only way that we can come to possess reasons for options in such cases is to go through experiences that can only be had after having chosen the option. L. A. Paul's example of having a child seems to be a case in point where condition (i) is not satisfied.¹²¹ Furthermore,

¹¹⁸ It may seem that my proposal is similar to Setiya's (2016, 5) discussion of retrospection where he seems to think that it is primarily an epistemic phenomena in which the options are on a par insofar as we lack specific knowledge of each option. Though I'm unsure about Setiya's proposal, we both share the suspicion that Chang underestimates how hard the requisite knowledge is to come by when making the paradigmatic choices she is considering.

¹¹⁹ See Paul (2015).

¹²⁰ Sullivan (2018) proposes and defends preference principles with the first condition while Hedden (2015) considers preference principles with the second condition.

¹²¹ If I'm right that certain reasons can only be possessed after one has a certain experience, this supports Paul's (2015) claim that we cannot make decisions in transformative experience simply by appealing to standard expected utility or by learning from the experiences of others.

given one's physical and cognitive limitations, if you make a choice that involves reasons that can only be fully possessed with certain experiences or extensive investigative effort, then the effort you spend on possessing these reasons could exclude you from possessing reasons for some other option or may cause you to lose the reasons you had previously possessed for that other option. If so, then condition (ii) is not met. Finally, since whatever choice you make, you will be in a position to rationally prefer that choice, it's unclear whether you can have stable beliefs about one's future preferences at all. In other words, you might not even be able to satisfy the antecedent of the preference reflection principle.¹²²

2.3.2 Will-Based Reasons in Parity Cases

I've argued that RMF does a better job of explaining why paradigmatic hard choices are hard than Chang's parity-based explanation. Let's now consider Chang's second claim.

2.3.2.1 Worries About Will-Based Reasons, Parity, and Agency

On Chang's view, we get to fully exercise our agency by creating will-based reasons if and only if, and because, the options in a choice are on a par. To create a will-based reason, you will an existing fact that favors a choice to be *your reason*. According to Chang, by putting your will behind the reason, your will grounds that fact as an additional reason for you to choose it. The weight of this additional reason breaks the parity situation and gives you most reason to choose the option that is backed by the will-based reason.¹²³ Chang's proposal faces two problems.

¹²² For another interpretation of why transformative experiences can make decision making difficult, see Moss (2018).

¹²³ Here's an illustrative passage from Chang:

If we take Chang’s explanation of how parity works, it’s unclear why solving cases involving options on a par implicates the need for will-based reasons. Recall that parity cases are often motivated by appealing to choices involving complex covering values that are determined by multiple components. Each option may excel along some component(s) of the complex covering value but not others. This is supposedly why there can be non-zero evaluative differences without bias (i.e. neither option is decisively better than the other though they are roughly “in the same neighborhood of value”). However, if this is what parity consists in, we have reason to doubt that parity cases are an interesting phenomenon that implicate the need for will-based reasons.¹²⁴

First, parity cases often involve values that are agent-dependent or subjective. For example, betterness as a dessert may just depend on gustatory preferences. Same with goodness as a career. If this is the case, then there is no need to appeal to will-based reasons (i.e. reasons whose normative source or ground is one’s will). If the relevant value is plausibly subjective, all we need to do is to determine which components in the complex *subjective* covering value gets weighted more heavily. This is something we can do even in

Thus, in hard choices you need not be stuck. You have the normative power to create for yourself a new will-based reason to pursue one option over the other. And you may now have most all-things-considered reasons—that is, considering both given and will-based reasons—to choose one option over the other. Distinctive of Hybrid Voluntarism is the claim that agents can make it true that they have most reason to do one thing rather than another directly through an activity of their own wills (2017, 17).

¹²⁴ Here’s an illustrative from Chang passage that confirms my reading:

In short, two items may be on a par with respect to V if they are qualitatively very different in V-ness but nevertheless in the same neighborhood overall of V-ness. Being qualitatively very different in V and in the same neighborhood of V overall, taken together, are sufficient conditions for parity with respect to V (2017, 14).

non-parity cases. Furthermore, even if one option A is better than option B, we could simply increase the weight of one of the value components so that B is now better than A.¹²⁵

Second, note that if the relevant covering value in a parity case is objective, then it's unclear why it can't be metaphysically determinate though epistemically indeterminate that the following obtains: evaluative differences favor one option or cancel each other out so that both options are equal with respect to the relevant covering value.¹²⁶ If so, then the examples used to motivate parity cases simply involves ignorance or are the result of insufficiently refined abilities to evaluative differences between options.¹²⁷ We should make these choices in the same way that we make other choices under ignorance. Thus, neither the subjective nor the objective interpretation of parity cases allows the will to play a distinctive role in resolving such cases. Let's call this the *Useless Will Problem*.

Here's the second problem. Suppose we grant that there are genuine parity cases as Chang describes them. Let's suppose that we cannot explain them in terms of (i) a lack of specificity between options, (ii) the inability of agents to make intercategory comparative judgments, or (iii) a failure to possess all of the relevant reasons.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Perhaps Chang may claim that "determining which components in the complex covering value should be weighed more" is just what it is to create a will-based reason. However, this seems to be a case where we can alter our agent-dependent given reasons (e.g. desire-based reasons) which she accepts are 'given'.

¹²⁶ For example, if the goodness of a movie is an objective matter, then even though *Black Panther* and *Moonlight* have non-zero evaluative differences but are in the same "neighborhood of value", it could still be the case that they are equally good, or one is indeed better because there is an objective function that takes in movie good-making factors as inputs and generates the exact degree to which a movie is good as an output.

¹²⁷ Andreou (2015) defends the idea that the relational judgments that go along with parity cases are the result of our ability to make categorical and relational judgments. This suggest that the explanation for why options can be on a par is not a thesis about objective value relations but how we make judgements between choices.

¹²⁸ As noted, the first option is from Setiya (2016) and the second is from Andreou (2015).

Even so, it's unclear why we can create will-based reasons only in such cases. If we have the ability to make will-based reasons in parity cases, then it's unclear why we can't do so in non-parity cases.¹²⁹ Presumably an answer would appeal to features of the will and how parity cases work. Chang does not provide much of an answer. Chang thinks that the will generates a reason out of a fact (which already favors an option) by serving as its ground. Chang then goes on to suggest that in parity cases, our given reasons (subjective and objective) create 'walls' that restrict but still allow the will to create will-based reasons.¹³⁰ But this is just a metaphor. A real explanation would have to tell us (i) why we have the ability to generate reasons out of facts by grounding them in our will, (ii) why it is present in parity cases, and (iii) why it is not present in all other cases. Chang could claim that will-based reasons can only be created out of given reasons (hence they serve as walls), but this is not enough to explain why the will can't make will-based reasons out of given-reasons when options aren't on a par. Absent such an explanation, limiting the will's powers to parity cases is arbitrary. Let's call this the *Arbitrariness Problem*.

2.3.2.2 An RMF Approach to 'Full Agency'

RMF can help us understand how hard choices are instances in which we can be 'full agents' without appealing to controversial metaphysical theses concerning parity or the will as an independent source of normativity. We can also avoid both the *Useless Will Problem* and the *Arbitrariness Problem*.

¹²⁹ Dorsey (2016, 180-182) makes a similar point.

¹³⁰ Chang (2014, 179).

Let's reconsider our career choice example. Even if we have doubts about parity, there's no denying that there are cases that involve evaluatively very different options that are nonetheless in the same 'neighborhood of value' as Chang puts it. Suppose that you've experienced both being an engineer and being an artist but have not committed to either career. You possess reasons to choose either option, but your possessed reasons don't decisively favor one option or the other. We should accept that many cases have this kind of structure even if we have doubts about parity.

So, what should we do in such a case? Chang is on the right track by appealing to the will. However, on the RMF, we don't have to appeal to Chang's controversial claim that the will is a separate normative source or ground that *enables one and the same fact* to be an *additional* reason for an agent. Instead, when we face hard choices, the will is involved in a metaphysically simpler but no less important way. We make a choice between similarly good options by engaging in reasons management. Assuming that we are not violating norms on reasons possession, we are free to choose to be an engineer, experience what it's like, and thereby possess more reasons to continue being an engineer. The will is implicated when we manage our reasons in a way that allows us to *stick* with engineering. In other words, we avoid prolonged artistic pursuits that would lead us away from engineering and focus our efforts on engineering in ways that would lead us to possess more reasons to do it. Rather than *create* more reasons to pursue engineering by implicating our will behind that choice, the Perspectivist makes a more conservative claim. In hard choices, we exercise our will by sticking to the choice we've made – thereby coming to possess more *already existing* reasons to favor that choice rather than *creating* them.

2.3.2.3 (Dis)solving the Useless Will and Arbitrariness Problems

Recall the *Useless Will Problem*.¹³¹ Chang thinks that in parity cases, we have the opportunity to express our agency by creating will-based reasons. However, on either objective or subjective interpretations of parity, the will is useless. If interpreted objectively, we should just resolve the problem like any other case of decision under ignorance. If interpreted subjectively, we should just stipulate or desire one option over the other.

Appealing to reasons management allows the will to play a role without taking on the metaphysical thesis that it is an additional source of normativity. We express our agency not by creating will-based reasons. Instead, in cases where there aren't stringent norms (or higher-order reasons) on what reasons we ought to possess, we use our wills in a very ordinary way. As I understand it, we will an option to be ours by employing our ability to control and maintain the reasons we possess so that we have most reason to adopt and continue to stick with that particular option. If we are weak-willed or decide to withdraw our will from a particular option, we relinquish our control over the reasons we possess and let the circumstances guide us either towards or away from that option. In Chang's words, we drift.

This metaphysically ordinary way of understanding the will's role in hard choices can also help us resolve the *Arbitrariness Problem*. Recall: Chang has not explained why the will has the power to create will-based reasons only in parity cases. Why is our will limited in this way such that we are 'fully agents' only in these kinds of cases? The question dissolves if we explain the role's will in terms of reasons management. There is no arbitrariness worry

¹³¹ Chang (2002) uses cases to motivate parity but does not provide an argument against this possibility.

because we can technically manage our reasons in any choice. Of course, doing so can often be irrational. When one option is clearly better than the other and the norms on reasons management are strict, managing our reasons amounts to rationalization. We're being irrational agents rather than 'full agents.' However, there are cases in which we *can* manage our reasons in ways that do express our 'full agency'. As noted, these are the cases in which we (i) possess reasons to choose either option even though neither option is clearly favored, (ii) know that if we were to choose any arbitrary option, we would eventually possess more reason to choose that option, (iii) recognize that there are no norms governing how we should manage our reasons when considering the relevant options, and (iv) have sufficient time to make such a choice. Cases with this kind of structure are genuinely hard to resolve. They're not like dessert selection. Instead, paradigmatic cases that satisfy these conditions involve choosing a career, a personal project, or a romantic partner. They require us to take a stand on what reasons we will possess and continue to possess. They implicate the need for the will to engage in reasons *management*, not reasons *creation*.

To sum up, I've been fairly critical of Chang's approach to hard choices and agency in this section. Nonetheless, I suspect that we are in deep agreement on the points that matter. In particular, we are not just agents determined by reasons. It's not true that the only instances in which we are 'fully agents' are the cases in which options are objectively incomparable in value or they're exactly equal in value. Furthermore, the will plays an important role in determining what we ought to do.

Unlike Chang, I'm skeptical that parity is a genuine fourth value relation and that the will can create will-based reasons only when options stand in this relation. Nonetheless, Chang and I are sympathetic to the Kantian idea that as agents, we are able to stand over and above existing reasons and to authorize some of them as our own. Chang says we authorize

them to be our reasons through an act of will, thereby creating a new reason out of an existing reason. My view is simpler and more systematic. We “authorize” some reasons to play a justificatory role in deciding what we ought to do but not others by managing the reasons we possess or fail to possess. This is all we need to keep the core Kantian insight that we are agents with the normative power to stand over and above our reasons and to authorize some of them as reasons that apply to us.

Having seen how RMF can make sense of how we are agents with the normative power to resolve hard choices through controlling what reasons we possess, let’s now consider how this can be extended to options and permissions more generally.

2.4 The Requiring and Justifying Reasons Strength Distinction

Gert (2003), Dancy (2003), and Little (2013) have argued that reasons have two distinct strengths or provide two different types of normative support. Reasons that have one type of strength need not have the other. To focus our discussion, let’s consider Gert’s way of drawing the distinction:

Justifying Strength: A reason has justifying strength to the degree that it makes an otherwise irrational action permissible.

Requiring Strength: A reason has requiring strength to the degree that it makes an otherwise permissible omission irrational.

For example, putting \$200 in a box that makes it unusable to you is irrational. But suppose the box is a donation box and the \$200 will go towards preventing harms to 40 children. This fact is a reason that makes the otherwise irrational act of putting \$200 in a box permissible. It *justifies* the action, but, as Gert claims, it does not make omitting to do so

irrational. The reason does not generate a requirement to do so.¹³² On the other hand, suppose that a mob boss threatens to cut off your index finger if you don't put \$200 in a box. The fact that you will lose your index finger, according to Gert, makes the otherwise permissible omission of refraining from putting \$200 in the box irrational. In other words, this fact *requires* you to act.¹³³

The distinction, though intuitive, entails a surprising result:

No Weighing Explanations: Reasons support actions in two fundamentally different ways (justify/require). Thus, there is no univocal property (i.e. weight) by which reasons favor actions.¹³⁴

Despite the fact that weighing reasons is a complex issue, it is a common assumption that reasons can, in principle, be weighed against one another in order to generate claims about what an agent ought to do.¹³⁵ Such calculations depend on the idea that reasons have a univocal property (e.g. weight) that can be combined even if such calculations can be complex. Gert has pointed out that the requiring/justifying distinction challenges this approach to practical deliberation because there is no univocal property of normative support that can be used to make such calculations. Even if we know the requiring and justifying strengths of all the relevant reasons for an agent, we may still have no way of

¹³² Gert (2003, 9) believes that his distinction provides a certain advantage. Preventing harms to 40 children is an altruistic reason that justify a lot. It is a reason that has significant strength. Nonetheless, it does not generate a requirement on us to donate. If there is a distinction between justifying and requiring strength, we can say that though preventing harms to children has significant justifying strength, it does not have much requiring strength. Thus, we can simultaneously say that the reason has significant strength but also claim that it is not strong enough to generate a rational requirement.

¹³³ You can find the specific formulations on (ibid., 16).

¹³⁴ Gert (ibid., section 1) discusses weighing-explanation views.

¹³⁵ For example, see Lord and Maguire's (2018) anthology on weighing reasons. Even objectors to weighing explanations such as Titelbaum (forthcoming) accept that facts combine to provide normative support for conclusions. It's just that these support relations can be probabilistic or logical.

determining what an agent ought to do because requiring and justifying strengths aren't commensurable. Instead, what we are left with is a complicated dualist theory of reasons weight on which reasons provide normative sort in two distinct and irreducible ways: justifying and requiring strength.

While I find the previous upshot unattractive, Gert's distinction does seem to have an additional, and much more attractive, upshot.

Limits of Authority: Sometimes, moral and prudential reasons only have justifying force. Such reasons can only make actions choiceworthy but never required. Thus, in some cases involving both moral and prudential reasons, even if there's weighty prudential reasons to do something, you may still do what the moral reasons favor (vice versa). Neither prudence nor morality is authoritative over the other.¹³⁶

It leaves the possibility open that neither morality nor prudence are decisive from the perspective of practical rationality. In other words, when faced with both moral and prudential reasons, we sometimes have the option to act on moral or prudential reasons. Neither are authoritative in the sense that they must contribute to determining what we ought to do.

In this section, I argue that RMF can accommodate a version of the justifying/requiring strength distinction that (i) avoids **No Weighing Explanations**, (ii) keeps **Limits of Authority**, (iii) and makes better sense of Gert's motivating arguments for the distinction he draws.

¹³⁶ The label comes from Dorsey (2016) who uses the requiring/justifying reasons distinction in order to explain why neither morality and prudence are authoritative and why it's possible for us to justify our personal projects even in the face of moral demands. In order to defend these results, Dorsey has to tell a fairly complicated and seemingly gerrymandered ways of how reasons are to be weighed. My account is simpler.

2.4.1 Redrawing the Distinction

On RMF, a reason contributes to an explanation of what an agent ought to do from the deliberative standpoint only when the agent possesses that reason. I propose that we draw the justifying/requiring strength distinction by appealing to facts and norms about reasons possession.

Justifying Strength: A reason has justifying strength just in case its weight contributes to explaining what the agent ought to do if she were to possess it.

Requiring Strength: A reason has requiring strength to the extent that its weight *must* contribute to explaining what the agent ought to do.

Two comments. First, every reason will have justifying strength. But some reasons will also have requiring strength to the extent that its weight *must* figure in determining what the agent ought to do. Second, recall for the Perspectivist that a reason can only figure in determining what the agent ought to do if she possessed the reason. When we say that a reason ‘*must*’ contribute to an ought explanation for that agent, we are claiming that the agent *must* possess that reason. Recall the distinction we drew in section 2.2. We can understand this “*must*” probabilistically or normatively:

Must₁: The agent *must* possess some reason R because given the possession conditions for R, it is highly likely that the agent will possess R.

Must₂: The agent *must* possess some reason R because the norms on reasons possession (or higher-order reasons) require that the agent possess R.

Again, recall our examples. As an example of *must*₁, an agent is highly likely to possess her own pain or predicted future pain as a reason to avoid or do certain actions. As an example of *must*₂, the honor code at a student’s school *must* figure in determining what

the agent ought to do because her duties as a student requires that she possess the honor code's directives as reasons (even if she is not presently aware of the honor code).

With the distinction on board, we now have a way of denying **No Weight Explanations** while keeping **Limits of Authority**. Let's first turn to **No Weight Explanations**. On my account of the justifying/requiring distinction, we can make sense of some of the intuitive judgments that Gert makes without having to appeal to a dualist theory of reasons weight. Reasons just have one type of normative support: weight. The distinction that needs to be drawn is not in terms of weight but *when that weight must figure in practical deliberation*: (i) the weight of some reasons (those with requiring strength on my view) must figure in determining what an agent ought to do, while (ii) the weight of other reasons (those with less or no requiring strength) need not be possessed and thus need not figure in determining what an agent ought to do.

To illustrate, let's reconsider Gert's example of donating \$200 dollars to prevent harm to 40 children. I think we should already be skeptical of Gert's claim that the altruistic reason merely justifies but cannot generate a requirement to donate the \$200. Nevertheless, appealing to possessed reasons can help us capture what is plausible about such a claim. The fact that donating may prevent harm to 40 children may be a reason that you either don't possess or don't fully possess. First, it's not true that we must₁ possess the reason. Recall from section 2.2 that perhaps some reasons can only be possessed with acquaintance. Perhaps in this case, we can possess or fully possess the reason to help the children only if we know who they were and the kind of suffering they were going through. More plausibly, it may be the case that even if we know that donating \$200 will prevent harm to 40 children, we may still not know how to fully use such a fact in our deliberation as the normative reason it is. Why? For one, we might have doubts about how the money will be used or

whether it would perpetuate a cycle of dependent aid.¹³⁷ Furthermore, we might not know whether donating the \$200 will be the most effective way for us to help as there might be better ways to spend that money.¹³⁸ Second, there may be no norms or reasons that would require that we learn about how the children are suffering or to learn more about how donations work. There are perhaps reasons associated with opportunity costs that counts against doing so. Thus, it's not always true that we must₂ possess the reason to donate the money either.

Note: it's a good-making feature of my explanation that even though such a reason might not have requiring strength (in the sense I stipulate), *pace* Gert, it can still generate a requirement to donate. For example, if we know how the children are suffering, know that the money will help the children without perpetuating adverse effects, and it's the most effective use of our money, then we fully possess this weighty reason to donate. We have a better ability to use the fact as the normative reason it is to donate. In such a case, the intuitive thing to say is that the reason does requires us to donate.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Temkin discusses these issues in his 2017 Uehiro Lectures. The audio can be found <https://www.practicaethics.ox.ac.uk/uehiro-lectures-2017#tab-481716>.

¹³⁸ For example, perhaps spending that \$200 or investing it would allow you to be able to donate \$1000 and help 200 children just two months from now. Relatedly, Portmore (2011) has argued that we have permissions not to act on moral reasons so long as there are actions that are still available to us to realize a mixture of prudential and moral goods. An upshot of his view is that the longer and longer we wait to realize moral goods, the fewer and fewer options we have to pursue prudential goods later in our lives.

¹³⁹ One might think that these are just additional reasons. I think the better approach is to point out that these additional facts serve as enablers for the initial reason: donating the money would save 40 children. If you disagree and think that these are just additional reasons, then note that procuring evidence for these additional reasons carries significant opportunity costs that might count against doing so. Finally, I think we're required to donate money (and maybe even required to risk our lives) to save the 40 children anyway. Thus, I'm okay if you don't think that any of these explanations are ultimately convincing. I'm just arguing that appealing to possessed reasons can help us explain why one might think that we are not required to donate money or risk one's life to save 40 children.

Consider Gert's second example. The fact that you would lose your index finger does seem like a reason that would require you to donate \$200. We can explain this without appealing to the claim that reasons have a distinctive requiring strength. First, given the nature of pain and our familiarity with our own pain, it's highly probable that we will possess it as a reason to donate the \$200. Thus, that's why it must₁ play a role in determining what we ought to do. Furthermore, there are arguably norms and reasons that favor or even require us to possess this reason. We possess reasons to be effective agents or to care for our own welfare that would generate instrumental reasons to keep our fingers by parting with the \$200. Thus, it's also true that it must₂ play a role in determining what we ought to do.

Now let's consider **Limits of Authority**. The motivation behind this thesis is that even when there are potentially weighty reasons to pursue some moral or prudential good, it need not be the case that either the moral or the prudential good is authoritative. For example, if we have the opportunity to further our own career or the career of our friend to an equal degree, we may be free to do both. We can account for this in the same way that we account for will-based reasons. In such a case, there may be no norms or reasons that require us to possess either reason to the fullest degree. If this is the case, then neither reason will have "requiring strength." Neither reason must play a role in determining what you ought to do. Neither are authoritative in determining what you ought to do. Depending on your commitments and how you've managed your reasons, you may act on prudential or moral reasons.

The idea that there are reasons that justify but need not play a role in determining what we ought to do can also make sense of a related distinction associated with the requiring/justifying strength distinction. This distinction is the non-insistent

(enticing)/insistent reasons distinction (Dancy 2003).¹⁴⁰ The distinction is defended on the grounds that there are cases that involve reasons on which we are free to act on or not. In these cases, reasons may justify (entice) actions but need not contribute to what an agent ought to do. Musicals have many good-making feature, but these features don't generate reasons that require you to love them. In the last chapter, I argue that we can claim something similar on my view. The qualities of any person can contribute to determining what you ought to do or who to love if you were to possess them as reasons. However, you don't possess everyone's qualities as reasons to love them. Nor are you required to possess them. In fact, you may sometimes be required not to possess them.¹⁴¹

2.4.2 Mending Gert's Arguments

Having preserved what was intuitive about Gert's distinction while avoiding its shortcomings, let's revisit two of his arguments for the distinction. Not only are these arguments consistent with how I draw the justifying and requiring strength distinction, they're actually made more compelling by the distinction I draw.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ We'll see a similar parallel in Setiya (2014) and Jollimore (2012) in chapter 4.

¹⁴¹ I discuss these issues in detail in chapter 4.

¹⁴² Gert (*ibid.*, section 3) also considers an argument from morality and an argument from burden of proof. The first argument is to point out that the domain of morality and practical reasoning both involve reasons where the justifying/requiring strength distinction applies. I agree. The second argument appeals to the idea that reasons have two roles: they make actions either go from permissible to irrational or irrational to permissible. He takes this to support the requiring/justifying strength distinction. Though I suspect that these distinctions are orthogonal and am suspicious that reasons have these two distinctive roles, the way I draw the distinction can account for these two roles too.

2.4.2.1 Argument from Transitivity

First, Gert proposes the following claims as true.¹⁴³

- (1) Saving forty children is roughly as important as saving one's career and life, for in a choice between the two, either option is rationally permissible.
- (2) Saving forty children is roughly as important as saving two hundred dollars, for in a choice between the two, either option is rationally permissible.
- (3) Saving one's career and life is clearly more important than saving two hundred dollars, for in a choice between the two, one is rationally required to spend the two hundred dollars.
- (4) Saving one's index finger is clearly more important than saving two hundred dollars, for in a choice between the two, one is rationally required to spend the two hundred dollars.

Gert points out that (1)-(3) entail that "roughly as important as" fails to be transitive. Furthermore (1), (2), and (4) entail saving one's index finger is more important than saving one's life or career. Gert takes this as positive evidence that "roughly as important as" is equivocal because reasons can be weighed in two different ways: on their justifying or their requiring strengths. We should already be suspicious of this argument. First, intransitive preferences may be ubiquitous and cannot be resolved by disambiguation.¹⁴⁴ Second, (1) and (2) are intuitively false.

¹⁴³ Gert (*ibid.*, 14-15).

¹⁴⁴ Temkin (2012) considers cases that involve comparisons between a spectrum of scenarios where two or more factors are important to the overall comparison. Transitivity fails because different features may be decisive depending on what options are being compared.

RMF can help us make sense of how (1)-(4) all could be true without having to posit two different kinds of normative support. Instead, they can all be true depending on whether the agent must₁ or must₂ possess the relevant reason in question.

Accounting for (1) and (2), the fact that you will save 40 children is a weighty reason that *can* outweigh the cost of \$200 or even your career or life. *Pace* Gert, I've already pointed out that (1) and (2) are simply false – saving 40 children *is* more important than having \$200 and plausibly more important than one's life.¹⁴⁵ However, we can appeal to reasons possession in order to capture the intuitive appeal of (1) and (2). Though saving 40 children is a weighty reason that can outweigh the cost of \$200 or even your life, it need not *actually* do so in every case because we may fail to possess or fully possess the fact as a reason that determines what we ought to do.¹⁴⁶ If the latter is the case, then the possessed reason to keep \$200 or save one's life will outweigh the unpossessed (or only partially possessed) reason to save 40 children. Thus, saving one's life or even \$200 could be roughly as important as saving 40 children and either option could be rational depending on how we've managed our reasons.

Accounting for (3) and (4) is also straightforward. Saving one's life, career and even one's index finger are reasons that we almost always possess and are required to possess (though such reasons can be outweighed). Since we must possess reasons in both senses to save our lives, careers, and index fingers, such reasons will almost always outweigh reasons

¹⁴⁵ Act Consequentialism is a live view after all (though I'm not sympathetic to it).

¹⁴⁶ As I noted earlier, if the agent knows the 40 children and how they're suffering and is assured that the money will be effectively spent and that donating now is the best use of the money, then the agent fully possesses the reason and it decisively favors donating or maybe even sacrificing one's life.

to save \$200. Thus, it is clearly more important and rationally required for us to give the \$200 to save our lives, careers, or index fingers.

2.4.2.2 Argument from Ideal Motivation

Gert has also suggested that the requiring/justifying strength distinction matches different levels of ideal motivation. The requiring strength of a reason is the minimal motivation that an ideal agent must have in response to that reason. The justifying strength sets the maximal motivation than an ideal agent can have in response to that reason.¹⁴⁷

The way I draw the requiring/justifying strength distinction can make sense of this fairly easily. Note first that if justifying and requiring strength can both be understood in terms of limits on motivation, this is reason to think that justifying and requiring strength aren't two different types of normative support. But more importantly, RMF motivates my distinction in a way that not just posits but *explains* why some reasons *must* motivate an agent (at least to some degree) while other reasons *could* motivate an agent. As I've pointed out, depending on the conditions for possession and the norms on possession, some reasons must (in both senses) play a role in determining what an agent ought to do. Given awareness of our own mental states and desire for self-preservation, we will almost always possess the possibility of losing one's life, career, or even index finger as a reason for action. That's why when such reasons apply, all agents will be expected to have a certain degree of motivation to act on them. The suffering of those who are far away, the distinct pleasures of some rare fruit, or the qualities of some potential romantic partner aren't reasons that we must possess

¹⁴⁷ See Gert (*ibid.*, 20).

(in either sense). Thus, though such reasons can significantly motivate an agent if she were to possess such reasons, they need not do so for every agent.

2.4.3 Supererogation

Let's consider one final advantage of RMF's way of drawing the requiring/justifying distinction over the dualist theory of reasons weight proposed by Gert. Consider the following example:

Half-hearted Rescue: A house is on fire. You can see two children who are trapped in need of help, but no one is around. Having decided that there isn't enough time to wait for the firefighters, you jump in to try to save them. Though you could have easily saved both once you entered the building, you decide to only to save one of them.¹⁴⁸

If Gert wants to say that you are permitted but not required to save the children, then presumably the fact that the children will be harmed by the fire is a reason with significant justifying but little to no requiring strength. The dualist theory of reasons weight may be appealing at first, but it makes an implausible prediction in this case. If you're permitted but not required to save either child, then presumably this will remain the case once you've entered the burning building. But this doesn't seem right. If you could have easily saved both children, the fact that the other child will be harmed by the fire no longer seems to merely justify rather than require saving her. Instead, it seems to require it even if you've already saved one child. Instead of receiving praise for your half-hearted rescue job, criticism seems appropriate.

¹⁴⁸ Thanks to Fritz Warfield for mentioning this case to me.

Appealing to RMF can help. First, I'm skeptical as to whether it is merely permissible rather than required that you save the children. That said, RMF can also predict why you might not be required to save the children. First, it's possible that the balance of your possessed reasons does not favor saving the children. Perhaps endangering your life would threaten the well-being of your dependents or the chances of saving them are just incredibly low. Second, perhaps you don't fully possess the relevant reasons because you lack the ability to manifest knowledge about how to use them: you stand paralyzed and indecisive.¹⁴⁹

However, suppose that none of this was the case and you really do possess the fact that the children will be harmed by the fire as a reason to attempt a rescue. Suppose you deliberate from this fact to an intention to make the attempt which you then execute. On RMF, the possessed reasons retain their weight whether you're in the house or not. After saving one child, the fact that the other child will be harmed by the fire remains a weighty reason that will require you to save her. While our reasons can sometimes change in virtue of our actions, in this case, the reason to help both children can't go from merely justifying to requiring action just because you stepped into a burning house and saved the first child. Burning doors aren't magical reason-altering entities. RMF makes the right predictions. Gert's dualist theory of reasons weight does not.

¹⁴⁹ Perhaps we praise people who are willing to run into burning houses to save children not because it's above and beyond the call of duty in the particular instance. Instead, we're praising them because their capacity to possess moral reasons is greater than most of ours. Our praise for such persons should mirror the praise we might give to the brilliant mathematician. This line of thought is worth exploring as a response to the Paradox of Supererogation. Heroes feel they are obliged to do what they do. I think we should agree with their judgment but praise them instead for their superior capacity to possess reasons. Recall **Parental Insight**. This is exactly how I think about Jenny when she asked the right questions and gave the boy food.

2.4.4 Taking Stock

In this section, I've argued for a way of understanding the requiring/justifying strength distinction that does not require us to give up on weighing explanations of what an agent ought to do. Though I agree with Gert that weighing explanations aren't always easy to give, I disagree with Gert that the difficulty is caused by a dualist theory of reasons weight where reasons provide normative support in two fundamentally different ways. Instead, providing weighing explanations can be difficult because it's not always clear what reasons an agent possesses and to what degree they possess those reasons. This is because what reasons we possess depends importantly on the experiences we have, the commitments we make, what we know, and our ability to deliberate with said reasons.

That we have control over what reasons we possess also helps us to explain the **Limits of Authority**. Neither moral nor prudential reasons are overriding. Depending on what reasons we must (in either sense) possess, it could be the case that an agent would be doing what she ought to do by pursuing a prudential good even if there is an even weightier moral good that can be realized.¹⁵⁰ The same could be said for someone who has devoted their lives to understanding and alleviating poverty. RMF allows us to keep what is intuitive about the justifying/requiring distinction without retaining its defects.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I motivated RMF and showed how it can make sense of a broadly realist picture of practical reasoning. I've argued that if we accept that what we ought to do is

¹⁵⁰ For further discussion, see Dorsey (2016).

determined by the reasons we possess, then we can control what we ought to do by controlling the reasons we possess. I've pointed out how this is plausible when it comes to reasons that concern our personal lives (e.g. our intellectual and aesthetic pursuits). I then argued that the framework can improve on two existing attempts at rejecting stark realism. In the next chapter, I consider whether reasons management leads to the troubling result that it makes moral rationalization rationally permissible.

CHAPTER 3:

A RESONSE TO THE KNAVE: COMMUNAL PRACTICAL REASONING

In the last chapter, I motivated the following two theses:

Possessed Reasons: What an agent ought to do is determined by the reasons she possesses.

Possession: What it is for agent A to possess reason R to φ provided by fact F is for A to be in a position to manifest knowledge about how to use R to φ .

In addition, I've argued for the following:

Management: An agent is rationally permitted, in some instances, to control which reasons she possesses by controlling whether she satisfies the conditions for their possession.

Together, these three claims constitute the **Reasons Management Framework (RMF)**. In this chapter, I consider the objection that RMF not only allows agents to manage reasons related to their personal pursuits, it also allows agents to manage their moral reasons in ways that are intuitively rationally impermissible. I am both optimistic and pessimistic. First, the pessimism. I don't think that an individual who manages their moral reasons must necessarily be any more or less substantively rational (i.e. failing to respond to possessed reasons) than someone who manages their non-moral reasons.¹⁵¹ Second, the optimism.

¹⁵¹ There is a debate as to whether there is just one or there are at least two separate notions of rationality. Lord (2018) argues there is just one notion of rationality: properly responding to our possessed reasons. Worsnip (2018) argues that there is a separate notion of rationality that involves the structural coherence of one's mental states. I won't weigh in on the debate here. For the purposes of this paper, I will

While a knave can rationally choose to be immoral, RMF reminds us that we can also influence what reasons the knave possesses and thus what she ought to do.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In section 3.1, I set up a potential objection to RMF. It seems plausible that a lover is rationally permitted to engage in reasons management. She can choose to focus on her beloved's loveable qualities rather than attending to the loveable qualities of others. However, suppose a knave decides to (mis)manage her reasons by avoiding certain experiences or making herself unsympathetic so as to avoid possessing moral reasons to help others. If reasons management is rationally permissible for the lover, why is it rationally impermissible for the knave? If the defender of RMF thinks there has to be a rational difference between these two cases, then she needs to provide an explanation.

Section 3.2 is pessimistic. I consider several strategies that would impugn Knave with irrationality without also doing the same for Lover. I express skepticism towards such strategies. The result is that there is no deep asymmetry between Knave and Lover. Reasons management in the moral and the non-moral domain are subject to the same rational scrutiny.

Sections 3.3 and 3.4 are optimistic. The previous pessimistic result is only problematic if we continue to think of practical deliberators as independently trying to possess and respond to reasons. Things change if we start thinking communally. In section 3.3, I point out that if **Management** tells us that we can control what we ought to do by controlling the reasons *we* possess, then we may have similar control over what others ought

focus on the former notion which I'll call substantive rationality. I'm going to assume that the characters introduced in the case studies are structurally coherent. The notion of structural rationality and coherence will be discussed in 3.2.

to do by influencing what reasons *they* possess. If the Knave fails to possess moral reasons, then *we* can provide her with them. The best response to Knave is to help her satisfy the epistemic and practical possession conditions for moral reasons rather than to impugn her with irrationality.

In section 3.4, I address the objection that if RMF does not posit a deep asymmetry between Knave and Lover, then there should also be no deep asymmetry between our providing moral reasons to knaves and providing non-moral reasons to lovers. My response: guilty as charged. This is as it should be. Both moral and non-moral reasons management are subject to rational scrutiny. We are often free to manage our reasons, but any view that respects external objective values and reasons (like the present one) must point out that there are limits – limits that others can remind us of when they provide us with reasons that we've failed to consider.

3.1 Knave and Lover

Recall the Kantian Professor. Lord introduces him as follows:¹⁵²

Kantian Professor: Keith the Kantian is a prominent moral philosopher. He has developed a particularly compelling Kantian view about normative ethics. In fact, we can suppose that Keith has developed the true normative ethical view ... Suppose Keith knows that failing to tip the server will thwart a social norm that the waiter relies upon and he knows that thwarting a social norm that another person relies upon is a way of failing to respect dignity. He is thus in a position to know a priori that it follows from his perspective that there is a reason to tip the server. However, this doesn't guarantee that Keith is in a position to tip the server in an ex post rational way on the basis of the relevant reasons. Keith might find the server so contemptible that he simply cannot tip him on the basis of the

¹⁵² Lord (ibid., 109-110).

relevant facts. If this is right, then Keith doesn't meet the practical condition [on reasons possession] ...

This is an awkward case for the defender of RMF. If Keith does not satisfy the practical condition on reasons possession, then he does not possess the fact that the waiter relies on tips as a reason to tip him. Since what an agent ought to do is determined by her possessed reasons, then it's not the case that Keith ought to tip the waiter. But intuitively he ought to tip the waiter.

The defender of RMF can provide two immediate responses by filling in the details of the case. First, perhaps Keith fails to meet the practical condition because he's actually a born psychopath that lacks basic affective dispositions that are required for the possession of reasons.¹⁵³ A plausible response to Keith is that he really can't possess (most) moral reasons. Thus, we should hold him to a lower standard of moral responsibility. The second response is to argue that Keith actually possesses the basic affective dispositions that are required to satisfy the practical condition on reasons possession. Thus, he possesses the reason. It's just that in this case (and perhaps in nearby cases), he is failing to respond to it and is thus substantively irrational (i.e. failing to respond to a possessed reason). Given this failure, he is subject to blame for failing to do what he ought to do after all.

While both responses are promising, they won't cover all the potential interpretations of the case. Suppose that Keith was neither a born psychopath nor someone who is just absent-mindedly failing to respond to possessed reasons. A third possibility is that Keith's failure to possess moral reasons in **Kantian Professor** is the result of disciplined

¹⁵³ See Coates (2017) who uses empirical studies to support the claim that amoral psychopaths lack affective responses rather than the ability to think rationally.

and malicious reasons (mis)management.¹⁵⁴ Suppose that years before he ever met the waiter, Keith has become the kind of person that fails to possess moral reasons through his own doing. In response, the defender of RMF may want to claim though it's not true that Keith ought to tip now (because he fails to possess reasons to do so), it may still be true that he is subject to criticism for mismanaging his reasons in a way that would result in failing to possess moral reasons now.

If the defender of RMF wishes to adopt this strategy, she'll need to be careful. To see why, let's consider two cases of reasons management. First, consider:

Knave: Knave was often bullied and taken advantage of as a child. As she grew up, she decided that the only way to make it in the world is to develop an ice-cold unsympathetic character. As she excelled in the world of business, she grew more and more ruthless. She roots out sympathetic tendencies and dispositions by reminding herself of how such tendencies led to her bullying. She also deliberately avoids the poor or opportunities to provide comfort to those with physical and emotional needs (she fires her underlings at any sign of complaint), knowing that this will distract her from her business endeavors. Over time, she no longer has the capacity to be sympathetic, and in virtue of her daily routine, she never interacts with those in need. She fails to possess many objective moral reasons.¹⁵⁵

Second, consider:

Lover: Things are getting serious between Lover and Louise. Lover also knows her past. When things started to get serious with someone, Lover would often find herself hanging out with other women until she eventually trades up. Lover is determined for this

¹⁵⁴ For an excellent discussion of how the cultivation of vice can be practically rational (if divorced from its theological context), see Vogler (2002).

¹⁵⁵ Knave is, of course, an infamous figure in the history of moral philosophy. We find him in Hume's (1983) *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* Sec. 9 Pt. 2. His cousin, the fool, is found in Hobbes' (1994) *Leviathan* chapter 15. The historical reference is intentional. The response to the fool has inspired various forms of moral rationalism which I discuss in section 3.2.

not to happen again. This time Lover decides that she won't put herself in the position to intimately interact with other women (e.g. no dates, long walks with other women etc.). Instead, Lover decides that she will continue to seek and promote what is good in Louise and to see her faults in context. Lover, over time, solidifies her love for Louise, marries her, and takes herself to have decisive reason to be with her.

Most are tempted to think that something has gone wrong with Knave, but things are fine with Lover. But note that both Knave and the Lover are managing their reasons. Thus, the defender of RMF can't appeal to reasons management alone to explain the difference in judgment between the two cases. This leads to the following question:

Asymmetric Rationalization: If RMF says that we can rationally manage the reasons we possess in our personal lives (e.g. intellectual and aesthetic pursuits, romance etc.), then what prevents us from rationally managing the reasons we possess in our moral lives (e.g. reasons to help others, be sympathetic, charitable, generous etc.)?

Here's a tempting answer:

Substantive Irrationality: In the case of moral reasons management, any agent who attempts to avoid the possession of moral reasons will somehow fail to respond to decisive possessed reasons. This is not so for the non-moral case.

In the next section, I express skepticism towards **Substantive Irrationality**. I consider and reject several proposals that aim to show that reasons management must involve substantive irrationality in **Knave** but not in **Lover**. I argue that none of these proposals will get us the asymmetry we seem to want.¹⁵⁶ Nonetheless, my goal is not to argue that **Substantive Irrationality** is false. If you think it is true and think that one of the strategies considered in the next section works, I welcome your optimism. Even so, my

¹⁵⁶ One might think that the lover is being irrational to. This chapter focuses on Knave. I discuss Lover (and romantic relationships in general) extensively in the next chapter.

positive proposal is still worth considering. Rather than focusing on individual rationality, I point out that Perspectivism provides us with a model for how we can come to better respond to normative reasons together by combining our efforts in deliberation rather than going our separate ways.

3.2 Strategies for Asymmetry

3.2.1 Possessing Future Reasons Now

In order to understand the strategies to come, let's remind ourselves of **Possessed**

Reasons:

Possessed Reasons: What an agent ought to do is determined by the reasons she possesses.

Note that this states a synchronic condition. The reasons an agent possesses now determines what she ought to do now. However, we also want to consider how an agent came to possess her present reasons. Kieseewetter proposes we do this with the following principle:¹⁵⁷

Compatibility Constraint: At t_1 , A has decisive reason to φ at t_2 , only if A's φ -ing at t_2 is compatible with A's following a normatively optimal maximal course of responses available at t_1 ... An available course is *maximal* just when no other available course includes it. Among the available maximal courses, only some will be normatively optimal, i.e. only some will be such that if A followed that course, then at every t from t_1 forward, A would conform to her decisive reasons at t .

The defender of RMF who wants to assert an asymmetry between **Knave** and **Lover** will want to appeal to **Compatibility Constraint**.

¹⁵⁷ Kieseewetter (2018, 100).

To see why, let's first illustrate the principle. Suppose that at t_1 , I want an ice cream and plan to drive to the ice cream shop at t_3 to pick it up. However, I know that it's a good idea to call in advance because they often sell out of ice cream before closing. I have decisive reason to make this call at t_2 . If I called, I would have known that they ran out. Thus, I would have decisive reason not to drive to the shop at t_3 . Unfortunately, I didn't make the call. As a result, I failed to possess decisive reason to skip the drive to the shop at t_3 . If I followed my decisive reasons at every point, I would have possessed decisive reason to skip the drive at t_3 . According to compatibility constraint, because I could have possessed decisive reason at t_3 to skip the drive if I followed the normatively optimal path (e.g. called at t_2), at t_1 I possessed decisive reason at t_3 to skip the drive.

Here's the application to Keith and Knave. Perhaps at some earlier point t_1 , there was a normatively optimal path such that if Keith and Knave had taken it, they would have had decisive reason to be sympathetic now at t_2 . If so, then on compatibility constraint, even if they don't actually possess those reasons at t_2 they could still be blameworthy at t_1 for failing to possess those reasons at t_2 .

In order for the appeal to **Compatibility Constraint** to work, the defender of RMF needs to establish two claims. First, she needs to precisify **Compatibility Constraint** to make it a plausible constraint on substantive rationality. Second, she needs to establish that there *is* a normatively optimal maximal course of responses starting from t_1 that would lead someone like Knave to possess moral reasons at t_2 .

Before expressing my skepticism of the second claim in the next two subsections, we have reason to be skeptical of the first claim. The problem with **Compatibility Constraint**

is that it (a) sets implausible demands on agents that (b) makes implausible predictions for **Lover**.¹⁵⁸

Consider (a). Note that **Compatibility Constraint** sets no time constraint between t_1 and t_2 . Suppose the span is thirty years. Imagine that Knave, when he was fifteen, was fed up with being picked on. Suppose that at that point, he still possessed decisive reason to be a good person. However, suppose that given a moment of weakness Knave decides to lash out and decides not to be sympathetic to his bullies. Unfortunately, unbeknownst to him, this decision forecloses any normatively optimal maximal response paths that would lead him to be sympathetic today at the age of forty-five. If this were so, we should be far less inclined to blame Knave for failing to possess moral reasons now. Even bracketing Knave, think about our own case. Perhaps, if we followed our decisive moral reasons at every point since birth, we'll come to possess far more moral reasons. I'm inclined to think that rationality is strict. Nonetheless, this result should give the strictest of us reason to pause. **Compatibility Constraint** impugns us with substantive irrationality, if *at any point*, we fail to respond to our decisive reasons. Now suppose we try to make the principle more plausible by putting restrictions on the elapsed time between t_1 and t_2 (e.g. six months). This won't get the result we want either. If Knave has made herself unable to possess moral reasons for years, then we cannot blame her now for failing to possess moral reasons. At least, I don't see how there is a non-arbitrary way of making **Compatibility Constraint** both plausible and able to get the intended verdict for Knave.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ For extensive discussion on the relationship between our present and future obligations, see Portmore's (2011) defense of moral securitism.

¹⁵⁹ Admittedly, our intuitions aren't crystal clear. If Knave has been failing to possess moral reasons for years, then one might be sympathetic to the idea that Knave can no longer be held responsible.

Consider (b). Suppose that at the age of ten, I had decisive reason to read a poem. In virtue of reading that poem, normatively optimal maximal response paths have now opened up such that if I were to follow them, I would now possess decisive reasons to write poetry rather than the chapter you are currently reading. **Compatibility Constraint** would predict that at the age of ten, I possessed decisive reason to write poetry over philosophy. My writing this chapter now was and is substantively irrational. Parallel cases can be drawn up for Lover. Suppose that at some previous point, Lover made a mistake about her decisive reasons. There were normatively optimal maximal response paths that would have led her to possess decisive reason to love someone else (e.g. Thelma). None of this seems plausible.

One could respond that there are never decisive reasons to love a particular person or to pursue poetry over philosophy. Perhaps this is why we should think that reasons management is permissible in these cases in the first place.¹⁶⁰ If so, and assuming that we have a plausible way of specifying **Compatibility Constraint**¹⁶¹, the defender of RMF must now argue that even for agents like Knave, there is a normatively optimal maximal course of responses that would lead her to possess moral reasons.

In order to achieve this task, the proponent of **Substantive Irrationality** will have to posit that Knave must either (a) possess decisive second order reasons to seek and possess first order moral reasons or (b) decisive moral reasons, by their nature, are easy to possess. I'm skeptical of both strategies.

¹⁶⁰ I actually think there can be decisive reasons for love or personal projects. I discuss reasons for love in the next chapter.

¹⁶¹ Even if **Compatibility Constraint** fails, there might be some other principle that could be plausible. Nonetheless, such a principle would still need the second point which I argue against in the next two subsections.

3.2.2 Decisive Reasons to Seek Moral Reasons

The idea that there are second order decisive reasons to seek more first order reasons is fairly simple. In the previous chapter, we noted that the college student possesses decisive reason to know the honor code and to possess its directives as reasons against cheating. There, we noted that an agent's voluntarily adopted roles can generate second order reasons to seek or avoid first order reasons.¹⁶² Something similar may occur in the case of love. When lovers devote themselves to their beloved, it's plausible that they thereby give themselves second order reasons to focus on the qualities of their beloveds rather than the qualities of others.¹⁶³ Furthermore, there may even be non-voluntarily adopted roles that may generate similar requirements. Though most of us are involuntarily citizens of one state or other, being a citizen may nonetheless generate requirements to be broadly informed on political matters. At least in the case of democratic states, our votes can lead to policy results that can significantly affect other citizens.¹⁶⁴

If the above is plausible, then the defender of RMF might propose:

Substantive Irrationality (Roles): (i) Lover is rational in her reasons management because she has adopted the voluntarily adopted role of being a lover. This role can generate reasons to seek and to refrain from seeking certain reasons (e.g. the qualities of persons). (ii) Being a knave is not a voluntary role that could generate reasons to avoid seeking moral reasons. Any attempt at reasons management is just reasons mismanagement. (iii) Furthermore, there is the non-voluntary role of practical agent. This role does generate possessed reasons to

¹⁶² Hunter (2018) uses this example to illustrate the idea that there are knowledge directives – claims about what an agent ought to know that aren't determined by her present evidence. I think that such directives are often generated by these voluntarily adopted roles.

¹⁶³ I discuss this in the next chapter. Also, see Enoch (2011) for an account of robust reason giving.

¹⁶⁴ Tsoi (2018) generates these results from the assumption that there is a general moral duty to be informed about morally controversial matters. As you can guess, I'm skeptical of this assumption.

seek *moral* reasons. Thus, Lover is not substantively irrational. Knave is.

While I accept (i) and (ii), (iii) is controversial. While many are sympathetic to Korsgaard's idea that our practical identities (e.g. student, philosopher, parent, etc.) can generate possessed reasons related to that particular identity (e.g. reasons to study, know arguments, love their children etc.), the idea that just being a practical agent automatically generates possessed moral reasons or reasons to seek moral reasons is far more controversial.¹⁶⁵ The most prominent defender of this kind of view is Korsgaard (2009) who argues that the constitutive standard of action is the categorical imperative.

I won't argue against Korsgaard's view here. However, even if Korsgaard is right, it won't help establish **Substantive Rationality (Roles)**. To see why, consider the following variant on Kantian Professor:

Better Kantian Professor: Kyra is a moral philosopher with a sophisticated and convincing Kantian normative theory. Kyra also believes her theory and tries her best to act on universalizable maxims while treating others as ends in themselves. Alas, Kyra is also an ivory tower academic. Her daily routines seldom put her in contact with those in need. While she is a paragon of collegiality to faculty, students, and staff alike, she lives an upper middle-class life generally ignorant of the needs of those on the poorer side of town.

Kyra's case helps us recognize that Knave's avoidance of moral reasons is merely different in degree rather than different in kind from the way we live our lives. While we're inclined to think that Knave must be somehow substantively irrational, note that even if most readers of this chapter (and its author) make a good faith effort to be moral (e.g. follow the categorical imperative according to Korsgaard) we would still likely lead lives that result

¹⁶⁵ See Korsgaard (1997) for the first claim. See Korsgaard (2009) for a version of the second claim. For an additional illuminating discussion of moral rationalism, see van Roojen (2010).

in possessing far fewer moral reasons to sympathize and assist others than we could have if we gave up professional philosophy. As I've pointed out in the previous chapter, the possession of specific moral reasons can require extensive knowledge (e.g. knowing who is in need in the local community and how best to assist them) or experience (e.g. parental insight) that many of us may fail to possess given our actual pursuits.¹⁶⁶ Thus, even if Korsgaard is right that our roles as practical agents can generate reasons to seek moral reasons or to be moral, properly responding to those reasons (i.e. being substantively rational) is no guarantee that we'll lead lives that are significantly different in kind from the way Knave lives hers.¹⁶⁷

3.2.3 The Availability of Moral Reasons

Another strategy is to argue for an asymmetry in the nature of reasons:

Substantive Irrationality (Reasons): (i) The possession conditions for moral reasons is more stringent than non-moral reasons associated with our personal lives. Thus, Lover can be substantively rational even though she fails to meet the possession conditions that would allow her to possess the qualities of others as reasons to love them. (ii) The possession conditions for moral reasons are easy to satisfy. Knave, most likely, does possess moral reasons. She is simply substantively irrational by failing to respond to her (often decisive) possessed moral reasons.

¹⁶⁶ For discussion of the idea that many of our cherished personal projects may only be possible given systematic and historical injustice, see Wallace's (2013) discussion of the bourgeois predicament.

¹⁶⁷ Things might be different if there is an argument from the claim that we are practical agents to the claim that we must aim to seek out and possess moral reasons. Maybe a version of this would be an argument from the claim that we are practical agents to the claim that we must maximize utility (which requires knowing the consequences of our actions). Such arguments might be even more controversial than the Kantian one. Perhaps the best attempt comes from de Lazari-Radek and Singer's (2014) discussion and reconstruction of Sidgwick.

We could motivate (ii) as follows.¹⁶⁸ We start with the idea that the experience of pain is reason-giving for any agent.¹⁶⁹ We then appeal to a principle of coherence: if my own pain is reason-giving, then the pain of others must also be reason-giving (for me).¹⁷⁰ By the nature of pain and by being coherent, we will thereby come to possess moral reasons to aid others. We may then try to generalize the case of pain to other kinds of moral reasons as well. Since the experience of pain and rational consistency are presumably low bars, then any agent should easily possess moral reasons.

There are two problems for this strategy even if we grant its controversial premises. First, if Lord is right about Kantian Professor, the possession conditions of moral reasons requires more than having certain experiences and satisfying coherence requirements. The problem with Keith the Kantian Professor is not that he is inconsistent or that he does not know what pain feels like (or, in his case, treated with disrespect), it's that he lacks the affective dispositions to use facts as the normative reasons they are. Of course, we might want to claim that the Kantian Professor is responsible for his terrible dispositions, but not every case is like this. Consider:

Helpless Knavery: Knavery grew up in an environment where life was nasty, brutish and short. Resources were extremely limited, and few were ready to cooperate or share. Knavery's family also showed little affection towards her. Instead they modelled brutal behaviors and dispositions to keep themselves alive. As a result of this upbringing, Knavery now leads a cold and private existence. She is

¹⁶⁸ I discuss (i) in depth in the next chapter.

¹⁶⁹ See Parfit (2011).

¹⁷⁰ See Markovits (2014). Instead of positing consistency requirements for pain, she thinks of consistency requirements on ends. She argues that things are valuable insofar as they are made valuable by agents. If we recognize that we are a source of value, then by consistency and demands for theoretical unity, we must also recognize others as sources of value and treat them accordingly along Kant's humanity formula.

generally unsympathetic and fails to possess moral reasons to assist others.

This case reminds us that one's environment can be impoverished to the point that the possession of moral reasons (even if they are easily met by most) is not guaranteed. Even if agents like Knavery did their best to be consistent, they may simply lack the upbringing and environmental conditions that would lead them to possess the knowledge and affective dispositions that would allow them to possess moral reasons.¹⁷¹

Second, even if we are right about pain, the case may fail to generalize. It's implausible to think moral reasons are generally easier to possess than any other kind of reasons. Recall **Parental Insight** from the previous chapter:

Parental Insight: I work with kids from a neighborhood housing project and occasionally bring them to church after receiving permission from their parents. One time, I brought a boy who kept on fidgeting and insisted on getting a snack during the worship service. I told him I didn't have a snack and to wait until Sunday school. Jenny, a parent at the church, saw the situation and asked the boy whether he had breakfast. He answered no. She immediately gave the boy a sandwich and he calmed down and stopped fidgeting.

As optimistic as I am that we can learn substantive moral truths a priori, coming to possess moral reasons is often more complicated than engaging in basic a priori reasoning or experiencing pain.¹⁷² Possessing certain moral reasons can take a sensitivity to morally relevant features that even highly competent moral agents may fail to possess. Knowing how

¹⁷¹ The locus classicus for the idea is Aristotle's (2009) *Nicomachean Ethics*.

¹⁷² Though I don't agree with Bernard Williams' pessimism of objective value and reasons, I think he is right to point out that systematic moral philosophy often fails to appreciate the complexity of moral life. See Williams (1985). He is also right to point out that we are not dictated by normative reality. He is partially right to point out that "[a] radical form of freedom may be found in the fact that we cannot be forced by the world to accept one set of values rather than another (ibid., 141)." What he fails to realize is that this result requires anti-realism.

to tell when a child is in genuine need rather than merely acting up isn't easy. Nor is it easy to pick up on signs of abuse or depression as reasons to provide aid and support.

3.2.4 Moral Rationalism

The two previous subsections highlight what I take to be the most plausible strategies for defending **Substantive Irrationality**. I've argued that neither of them will work. Admittedly, I have not considered all such strategies.¹⁷³ If one does succeed, I'm happy to accept the result as it would defuse an intuitively plausible objection to RMF.

Nonetheless, it should be no surprise that someone like me who defends RMF is unlikely to be sympathetic to the strategies mentioned above. This is because they all involve some form of moral rationalism on which agents are guaranteed to possess moral reasons if they worked hard enough on their own (e.g. they're guaranteed to possess moral reasons by being better at a priori reasoning, structurally coherent, or responsive to already possessed reasons).¹⁷⁴ Perspectivists with a commitment to external values and reasons reject such guarantees. Even if it were true that all of us could possess general moral truths on the basis of reflection, differences in what we know and our practical and epistemic dispositions could lead us to possess very different sets of reasons. Perspectivism always leaves the possibility that an individual perspective can be blind to weighty objective reasons either by her own doing or misfortune. However, Perspectivism also provides a path forward. If an individual

¹⁷³ For example, see Bloomfield (2014) for an Aristotelian version of moral rationalism on which being moral is conducive to our well-being. Also see Peacocke (2004) who defends moral rationalism but recognizes the role of empirical investigation in an account of moral knowledge.

¹⁷⁴ Here are two ways of understanding moral rationalism. First, moral rationalism claims that substantive ethical truths can be derived from the standards of practical reasoning. Second, moral rationalism claims that a convincing answer to the question "why be moral?" can be given to the moral skeptic. I'm skeptical of these claims. Instead, I think knaves can be perfectly practically rational and still fail to possess moral reasons. See Vogler (2002), Williams (1985) and Setiya (2007) for additional skepticism of these claims.

fails to possess objective reasons either by her own doing or by misfortune, it's possible that others can help her come to possess objective reasons. In short, we can improve each other's perspectives.

3.3 Communal Practical Reasoning

3.3.1 Pessimism to Optimism

Asymmetric Rationalization forces the defender of RMF to explain why Lover's reasons management can be rational permissible while Knave's reasons management is always rationally impermissible. The previous section motivates an unsettling answer for the defender of RMF:

No Asymmetry: There is no deep asymmetry. Just as there are more or less substantively rational or irrational ways of managing your reasons in non-moral cases, the same applies for moral reasoning.

Given **No Asymmetry**, RMF seems to put moral reasons mismanagement (i.e. moral rationalization) as rationally on a par with reasons management in the personal domain. But no one thinks that rationalization (either in moral or non-moral cases) is legitimate. Thus, RMF must be false.

The rest of this paper is optimistic. In the next two sections, I argue that RMF is still plausible (perhaps even more so) if we accept **No Asymmetry**. First, what I've stressed in the previous section is that Knave's failure to possess moral reasons is merely different in degree rather than kind from our own failures. In virtue of our finite capacities and environmental, most of us will lead lives that will leave us more sensitive to some moral reasons rather than others. There's a little bit of knave in all of us. The solution is not to impugn Knave with irrationality or stupidity. Nor should we try to possess moral reasons all

on our own. The way we correct Knave's perspective is the same way we correct the perspectives of ordinary people— we reason together in ways that would help one another possess moral reasons. I sketch out what this communal reasoning looks like in the present section.

Second, I point out that **No Asymmetry** correctly predicts that we can mismanage reasons in our personal lives as well. Reasons management can be subject to criticism in both moral and non-moral cases. Reasons management is impermissible when it leads us further and further away from normative reality (i.e. leads us to possess fewer and fewer weighty objective reasons). Insofar as we should change Knave's myopic moral perspective, we should also change Lover's myopic loving perspective if Louise turned out to be emotionally and physically abusive. I discuss this in section 3.4.

3.3.2 Communal Practical Reasoning

Pace the defenders of moral rationalism, advising the Knave to think more clearly or coherently on her own is certainly not the only and probably not the best way to get her to possess moral reasons. Recent research suggests that reasoning (moral reasoning included) is primarily a means of interpersonal justification and rationalization as opposed to tracking and discovering the truth.¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, the recent literature in moral psychology suggests that most of our deliberating and acting are often the result of morally arbitrary factors.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ See Sperber and Mercier (2017) as well as Haidt (2001). Though I agree that moral reasoning will often involve rationalization, is subject to social and cultural influences, and often involves areas of the brain associated with affect, this does not mean that it cannot deliver important a priori moral truths in the proper conditions.

¹⁷⁶ See Doris (2015) for an impressive summary of the recent moral psychological literature and additional support for situationism (i.e. that humans do not possess character traits).

Rather than having stable character traits that are systematically responsive to reasons or right-making features, at best, we have mixed traits (i.e. stable cross-situational dispositions to act in both morally good and morally bad ways based on morally arbitrary factors such as offensive sensations, mood, the instructions of an authority, fear of disapproval, etc.).¹⁷⁷

If practical reasoning were an individualistic endeavor in which we can't influence and can't be influenced by others, Perspectivism is in trouble. But nothing in RMF or Perspectivism requires this commitment to individual practical reasoning. The same researchers who argue that reasoning alone can lead us away from possessing and responding to moral reasons also point out that we are more likely to respond to morally relevant features and to track the truth if we reasoned together.¹⁷⁸ The defender of RMF should reject individualism and consider the benefits of communal reasoning.

The previous chapter provides us with a framework to see how this is possible. If we can control what reasons we possess by considering the epistemic and practical conditions for reasons possession, then we can control what reasons others possess to the extent that we can help others satisfy those epistemic and practical conditions. Let's examine them in turn.

3.3.2.1 The Epistemic Condition

Recall that in order to possess a reason, we must be in the position to know the fact that is the reason. If Knave's failure to possess moral reasons is due to her intentionally

¹⁷⁷ See Miller (2014) for the development and defense of the thesis that most of us have mixed traits.

¹⁷⁸ Again, see Doris (2015) and Sperber and Mercier (2017). See MacIntyre (1981) for an example of a moral theory that focuses on communal conceptions of value rather than individualistic ones. For an excellent historical survey of these matters, see Irwin (2008)'s discussion of Aristotle and the Stoics.

avoiding inconvenient facts (e.g. that there are people suffering around her that she could help) and Knavery's failure to possess moral reasons is due to her impoverished environment, then we can help Knave and Knavery possess moral reasons by providing them with the relevant information. Of course, getting Knave and Knavery to consider the information rather than to ignore it may be difficult. But at the very least, what reasons Knave and Knavery possess are not completely dependent on their own activities. Instead, we can indirectly influence what reasons they possess by directly affecting what they know.¹⁷⁹

This result is worth emphasizing. If the previous chapter is correct, then (a) the possession of moral reasons depends on what we are in the position to know, and (b) what we ought to do is determined by the reasons we possess. This suggests that if one is in the position to know more than others in one's community, then one may possess more reasons. With more reasons, comes potentially more responsibility. Furthermore, community wide ignorance or inability to agree on facts can have devastating results on our ability to influence each other's possessed reasons. While these points deserve further treatment, we can illustrate them with three examples.

First, we often possess specialized knowledge that allows us to possess certain reasons that others can't. Jenny's training as a nurse and her experience as a mother allows her to possess moral reasons that I can't possess on my own. Luckily, Jenny is more than willing to share them with me when needed. Here's another example. Experts in international aid efforts may have a responsibility to tell others about such efforts in order to get them to possess moral reasons to donate. Given Singer's knowledge of the Bangladesh

¹⁷⁹ Lord's (2018, 72) example of the absent-minded husband is a case in point. The wife can make sure her husband possesses a decisive reason to pick up the daughter by simply yelling at her husband to ensure that he knows that she can't pick up their daughter today.

Liberation War and the effect that writing his (1972) paper *Famine, Affluence, and Morality* would have on alleviating that suffering, he may have possessed moral reason to write the paper not just to inform academic philosophers but also to force members of the affluent West to possess moral reasons to donate.¹⁸⁰ Finally, note that some agents, through horrific experiences, may possess specialized knowledge that is emotionally difficult to share. Victims of genocide, war, famine, sexual assault, and debilitating mental illness may be in the unique position to inform others in ways that would lead them to possess weighty moral reasons they couldn't have had without that testimony. Though some victims find strength in being able to share such experiences, it may be unfortunate though true that those who have suffered the most may have an obligation to share them even if doing so can be horrible.¹⁸¹

Second, the ability for a community to influence one another's possessed reasons depends on whether members of that community can trust one another as reliable sources of information. The existence of fake news, propaganda, and automatic content curation has made it harder for people to trust each other from opposite sides of the political spectrum.¹⁸² With growing distrust of news organizations, members of a community from opposite political sides are less likely to possess moral reasons offered in debate not because they are less likely to accept moral testimony but because they are less likely to believe the

¹⁸⁰ A further upshot of Singer (1972) is that perhaps we aren't as free to pursue our own personal projects as we may have initially thought given what we could do with our time and money instead to help those in need.

¹⁸¹ For an example of this kind of personal testimony, see Levi's (2017) personal testimony of what it's like to be in a Nazi Concentration Camp.

¹⁸² For an illuminating discussion of how propaganda can work to hide inequality and erode democracy, see Stanley (2015).

descriptive facts offered (e.g. immigrants aren't more likely to commit crimes, global climate change is the result of human activities, etc.).¹⁸³

Finally, there are clear limitations to communal practical reasoning in the form of sharing information with one another. While it's plausible that the larger the community, the greater the knowledge pool and thus the more likely it is for members to possess reasons once that knowledge is shared, it's also possible that entire communities can believe falsehoods or groups within that community can lack the conceptual resources to accurately describe and understand their own experiences. In these cases, whole communities may fail to possess certain moral reasons. For example, homosexuality was listed in the DSM as a mental disorder or disturbance from 1968 until 1987.¹⁸⁴ Given that homosexuality is not a mental disorder, we possess decisive reason not to treat this sexual orientation as something to be cured. Given that access to moral reasons will depend on what we are in the position to know, there is a real possibility that even large and diverse communities can be blind to weighty moral reasons. Perhaps the best way to reduce the chances of this possibility is for a community to devote its time and resources to getting at the truth on matters that have significant moral repercussions.

¹⁸³ I should note that I am an optimist about moral testimony. Furthermore, I think the acceptance of moral testimony may actually be the quickest way for us to possess moral reasons that we can't have easily discovered on our own. For recent defenses of moral testimony, see Sliwa (2012) and McShane (2018).

¹⁸⁴ See Fricker (2007) for work on hermeneutical injustice and Dembroff (2016) for work on sexual orientation.

3.3.2.2 The Practical Condition

Though some think that satisfying the epistemic condition is enough for reasons possession,¹⁸⁵ we saw in the previous chapter that it is not. In addition to being in the position to know a fact, one possesses it as a reason only if one is able to use it as the reason that it is in practical deliberation. The lesson from **Kantian Professor** and **Parental Insight** is that the possession of certain moral reasons may require developing certain affective dispositions or reasoning capacities in order to manifest knowledge about how to use such facts as reasons. In the case of Keith, he lacked sympathy and instead was disposed towards contempt for those who he thought had a lower status than him. In my case, I lacked the ability to discern whether the child was acting up or genuinely hungry. Jenny knew from experience that he was probably hungry and needed food.

If this is correct, then the extent to which we can influence whether the Knave possesses certain moral reasons depends on whether we can impart these affective dispositions or reasoning capacities to them.¹⁸⁶ Though I am no Knave, if I spent enough time with parents and their children (or just had children of my own), I suspect I would develop the relevant reasoning capacities that would allow me to possess moral reasons in the way Jenny does.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Kieseewetter (2018).

¹⁸⁶ Short cuts are possible. If I have reliable moral testimony that a certain fact is a reason to do something, I might possess that reason by proxy through testimony. See Sliwa (2012) and McShane (2018) and Lord (forthcoming).

¹⁸⁷ A related thought from Bengson (2016) (from the previous chapter) and Murdoch (1970) is that the full possession of certain concepts (e.g. actionable concepts) would dispose the agent to act in accordance with the norms that govern the use of those concepts. Unfortunately, there is not much work on how we come to acquire and impart such concepts.

As for affective dispositions, it's unclear to what extent we can impart them to Keith, Knave, or Knavery if they don't already have them. As I pointed out earlier, few of us are actually virtuous. Instead, most of us have mixed character traits at best. Nonetheless, there is reason to be optimistic that these dispositions can be developed through habituation and modelling.¹⁸⁸ At the very least, the research in moral psychology is still relatively underdeveloped and there is much work to be done in determining which methods of moral education are most effective in getting people to reason and act well.¹⁸⁹ For now, the defender of RMF has reason to be optimistic that even if the Knave has mismanaged her moral reasons, we, as a community, can help her possess the moral reasons that she has avoided.

3.3.3 The Worst-Case Scenario

I conclude this section by reconsidering the limits of communal practical reasoning.

Given my claims about reasons possession, the following seems to be possible:

Worst Case: The lives of an isolated group of islanders is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. The members of this group are isolated from modern civilization and resist any attempts at contact. They lack basic scientific knowledge or technology that would allow them to sustain agriculture on their small island. In order to survive, each individual has to fight for limited resources as hunter gatherers. This has led members of the group to be ruthless in their pursuit of survival. They may occasionally assist one another but tend to be vicious and selfish.

In this worst-case scenario, we have a group where none of the individuals seem to possess moral reasons. If so, then there seems to be no way in which some members of the

¹⁸⁸ For an account of moral education, see Kristjánsson (2015) who develops a moral education framework called Aristotelian Character Education.

¹⁸⁹ See Miller (2016) for a discussion of the empirical support for Kristjánsson (2015).

group can attempt to impart moral reasons to others. This community is closed off in a cycle of viciousness. Garbage in, garbage out.

There are ways to resist this worst-case scenario. First, perhaps a priori reflection can lead us to possess general moral truths. Thus, at some point, some person in the group might come upon those truths and share them with others. Second, perhaps any sustained contact with another person would lead us to possess moral reasons. Though I'm skeptical of moral rationalism, I'm sympathetic to such claims and perhaps they can lead any community, no matter how isolated, to possess some moral reasons.

However, I think the lesson to learn from considering the possibility of **Worst Case** is not to posit a Pollyannaish view of our access to normative reality (i.e. access to objective reasons and values). Instead, the possibility of such a scenario gives us reason to be vigilant. If a community is to respond properly to normative reality, the proper conditions must be in place. Such a community must be (i) open to the pursuit of knowledge, (ii) willing to develop appropriate affective and intellectual dispositions in its members, and (iii) sufficiently trusting (i.e. its members tend to trust each other). At the current time and place of writing (the United States of American in 2019) the following is true: though we are not in **Worst Case**, we can do better.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ One might still be concerned that my view leads to a kind of relativism. What if someone knows that she'll be confronted with moral reasons (e.g. church) in one community but not the other. If there are no reasons that require you to go to one community or the other, then can't that person just avoid going to the moral community and go to the libertine one instead. Two responses. First, everyone who is skeptical of moral rationalism faces this problem. I'm agnostic as to moral rationalism. This is not a problem that is special to my view. Second, assuming that moral rationalism is false (i.e. that there is some a priori guarantee that everyone will possess moral reasons if they were structurally rational or coherent), the best response to combat relativism is to do the hard work of creating moral communities (e.g. organize society in a way such to promote the dissemination and possession of moral reasons). How to achieve this was and should still be a key question of political philosophy.

3.4 The Asymmetry Revisited

In the previous section, I proposed that we address Knave's reasons management by counteracting it. Recall that I accept **No Asymmetry**. Reasons management in the moral case is not different in kind from reasons management in the non-moral case. Assuming this is correct, if Knave's strategy to avoid possessing moral reasons can be counteracted by informing him, exposing him to certain experiences, or modeling virtuous behavior, then what prevents us from doing the same in terms of reasons management for Lover? My response is simple: nothing. The defender of RMF should not try to make reasons management in the case of non-moral reasons associated with our personal lives immune to rational scrutiny. I defend the plausibility of this view by first focusing on one of our initial cases (e.g. **Lover**) and then reflecting on the rationality of reasons management more generally.

If we insist that there is a difference between Lover and Knave, it's not hard to find one. We've noted in section 3.2 that lovers can generate second order reasons to manage their first reasons in favor of their beloved. In virtue of their commitment (either public or private) to their beloved, the existence of a relationship, or having a child together, lovers can generate second order reasons to ensure that their first order reasons for love continue to favor loving that person. Furthermore, from the outside looking in, we also respect these facts about lovers. Out of respect for our friend's romantic choices, we don't try to introduce them to new potential romantic partners when they already have a beloved. This is not the case with the Knave. Being a knave does not generate reasons to avoid possessing moral reasons. Furthermore, if our friends become knaves (i.e. become less and less responsive to moral reasons), respect for our friends will either justify interference (i.e. helping them possess moral reasons) or withdrawal.

However, these differences do not make reasons management in **Lover** and **Knave** different in kind. We may respect a friend's romantic judgments (out of respect for their autonomy and a recognition that we don't possess all the facts), but when it is obvious that a friend (or even a stranger) becomes unable to recognize that her beloved is abusive, we should step in. The lover in this case is engaging in a form of reasons mismanagement that would lead her to fail to possess weighty objective reasons. This failure can harm her even if she doesn't recognize it.¹⁹¹

One might object that since the previous case involves harm, it involves moral reasons. But there are also non-moral cases of reasons mismanagement where the agent is subject to rational criticism and intervention is warranted. For example, suppose John spends all of his past time listening to muzak while counting blades of grass. He's also adamant about this. He does not let others introduce him to new music or other activities. There might be nothing morally problematic about this, but John's attempt at managing his reasons in favor of listening to muzak and counting blades of grass *is* subject to rational criticism. Even if he can't recognize this, we do. We recognize that he is failing to possess objective reasons and values (e.g. good music and meaningful activities). Perhaps privacy reasons outweigh reasons to introduce John to new music and activities. Nonetheless, John is subject to rational criticism even if we have other reasons to refrain from doing so. The cases we discussed, taken together, show that managing one's moral reasons is not always irrational while managing one's non-moral reasons is not always rational. Both can be subject to rational criticism.

¹⁹¹ I discuss abuse cases in more detail in 4.3. I also point out that forms of non-romantic love (or at least respect) is appropriate for all persons, even if they have negative or even dangerous qualities.

We can further illustrate this point by considering what rationally justifies reasons management in the first place. I've been arguing for a view of how agents relate to normative reality that respects the idea that normative reality contains objective external reasons and values that favor certain ways of thinking and acting but does not require us to take on specific personal projects. We are permitted, to some extent, to manage our reasons in ways that would allow us to continue to be justified in the pursuit of our personal projects. What makes this sort of reasons management rationally permissible, *pace* Gert, is not because reasons have permissive justifying rather than requiring weight. Nor is it, *pace* Chang, because we can create will-based reasons. Instead, I take reasons management to be rational insofar as it constitutes a good way of responding to normative reality given our finite physical, mental, and affective capabilities.¹⁹² Consider the following illustration:

The Louvre: Suppose you only have one day to visit the Louvre. One approach to responding to the aesthetic value in the museum is to run through the 652,000 square feet of public galleries to try to see it all. The likely result is that you'd just waste your entire day running without taking the adequate time to appreciate any particular piece of art. The more sensible thing to do is to slow down and focus your attention on selected works as you take your own path through the museum. Your friends do the same but take different paths. At the end of the day, you gather together with your friends and take turns sharing the different paths that you've gone down to note what else might have been worth closer examination if given another chance. Some paths are clearly terrible (e.g. staying in the bathroom staring at the urinal). Others might be objectively better than most (e.g. fitting in the *Mona Lisa*, *Death of the Virgin*, *Winged Victory of Samothrace*

¹⁹² One might worry that on my view, our normative freedom is proportional to the extent to which our capacities are finite and limited. I think this is exactly as it should be. First, compared to God (whose infinite capacities leads him to always possess all the relevant reasons), we all have significant latitude. Second, it's plausible to think that the more that we know and are capable of, the less normative freedom we have. Knowing that the contemplation of poetry is better than counting blades of grass, it should not be normatively permissible for us to count blades of grass.

etc.).¹⁹³ Even assuming that there is an ideal path, it's impossible to figure out what it would be without allowing people to try out and compare different paths.

Think of the Louvre as reality and your one day in it as your life. Some of us (e.g. da Vinci, Mother Teresa, Srinivasa Ramanujan etc.) may have the ability to cover more ground (come to possess and respond to a wide variety of moral and non-moral reasons) but none of us can cover all of it. The best approach is to engage in reasons management (i.e. to develop one's limited capacities to possess certain reasons while leaving oneself open to possessing other reasons). This applies in the case of moral reasons, the qualities of a person as reasons for love, and in our personal projects. But, just as there are bad paths through the Louvre that would lead one to miss out on what is valuable (e.g. staring at the bathroom urinal) there are also ways of mismanaging reasons that are irrational insofar as they deprive us from possessing weighty objective reasons or values (e.g. spending all of one's spare time counting blades of grass while listening to muzak).¹⁹⁴ This is the case whether the relevant reasons are moral or non-moral. Thus, **No Asymmetry** is not only correct, it also makes the correct

¹⁹³ Given that I'm attracted to value or reasons pluralism, I'm optimistic that there are multiple equally good paths that one could take. Even if you're not, it could still be multiple equally good paths to realizing the one true value.

¹⁹⁴ For a view on which there might be different approaches to one and the same normative reality, see Murdoch's (1970) *Sovereignty of Good*. For insightful discussion of Murdoch that connects with contemporary ethical debates, see Setiya (2013). In particular, Setiya notes that belief in the Good (the idea that the norms that govern the use of our concepts are consistent and unified) is consistent with Murdoch's (1970, 28) claim that "the movement to understanding is onward to increasing privacy":

To believe in the Good is to believe that one can perfect one's grasp of every concept. It is not to believe that there is just one way of doing so. Belief in the Good is thus consistent with the privacy of perfect understanding (Setiya 2013, 18).

While I don't put the issue in terms of concept possession and the norms that govern our concepts, I agree with the idea that there might be multiple ways of acting and thinking that fully respects normative reality.

prediction: counteracting the muzak loving grass blade counter's reasons mismanagement can be just as worthwhile as counteracting Knave's reasons mismanagement.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I've considered an objection to RMF: if we're rationally permitted to manage non-moral reasons, then why can't we do the same for moral reasons? The first section introduces the problem in detail along with a potential solution: **Substantive Irrationality**. In the following section, I argued that the main strategies for establishing **Substantive Irrationality** fail. Instead, I propose we accept **No Asymmetry** (i.e. managing our moral reasons is not different in kind from managing our non-moral reasons – both can be substantively irrational or rational). In the third section, I pointed out that though we may individually fail to possess weighty moral reasons, we can make up for our individual deficits by coming sharing reasons with one another. Finally, I addressed the remaining worry that there is still an asymmetry between moral and non-moral reasons management. I point out why the defender of RMF who believes in external reasons and values is better off rejecting the asymmetry. In the next chapter, I employ the lessons we learned in chapter 2 and this chapter to a key component of almost all of our lives: romantic love.

CHAPTER 4:

LOVE AND RATIONALITY: THE EXPERIENCE-COMMITMENT ACCOUNT

Consider the following case:

Tinder: Amal is a successful human rights lawyer. She also happens to be gorgeous and single. Amal has access to Tinder Select which helps match VIPs. Amal matches with George, a famous actor and humanitarian. Amal is skeptical at first. George has a reputation for being a bachelor playboy. After a few messages, Amal begins to realize that George's reputation is unwarranted. Despite his irresistible good looks, he's a sweet guy ready to settle down. After a few dates, Amal warms up to George. Slowly but surely, she deletes Tinder and asks friends to stop setting her up. Amal is starting to romantically love George.¹⁹⁵

Tinder and other online dating applications are increasingly common ways for potential romantic partners to meet. Some are suspicious that online dating is destroying romantic love. You might be comfortable with the technological status quo, but consider if technology were to improve:

Super Tinder: Amal is serious about George. However, she was recently given an exclusive upgrade to Super Tinder. Super Tinder produces a highly accurate psychological and physical profile of its users through questionnaires and body scans. It also matches couples with a 99.7% customer satisfaction rate.¹⁹⁶ Super Tinder matches Amal with Nayla, a wickedly smart and stunning filmmaker. Out of

¹⁹⁵ The story is inspired by George and Amal Clooney. They didn't meet through Tinder, but similar stories are common. As an example of romantic love among the rich and famous, around 15% of NYT wedding announcements between 2015 and 2016 involve couples who met through some online dating application. See <https://www.vox.com/2016/5/31/11796170/new-york-times-weddings>.

¹⁹⁶ If you find Super Tinder implausible, the same points will apply if you imagine a friend who has a reliable track record of matching couples.

curiosity, Amal checks to see if Super Tinder matches her with George. It does not.

Suppose for all of the qualities that Amal is interested in – beauty, intelligence, and moral character – Nayla is superior to George. Upon discovering Nayla as a possibility, is Amal rationality required now to love Nayla? Arguably not. Amal hasn't even met Nayla. It even seems rationally permissible for Amal to ignore the Super Tinder match altogether and plan her next date with George.

These judgments seem plausible, but a problem arises if we accept the following claims. For ease of discussion, I'll use 'love' to refer to romantic love unless stated otherwise.

The Quality View: The loveable qualities of a beloved are weighty reasons for loving him.¹⁹⁷¹⁹⁸

Rationality: If an agent is choosing between any two attitudes or actions A and B, it is rational for an agent to choose attitude or action A only if she does not possess more/weightier reason to choose B.¹⁹⁹

Basic Possession: What it is for agent A to possess reason R to have attitude φ provided by fact F is for A to know F and for R to be a reason to φ .²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ For examples of the quality view, see Howard (forthcoming), Jollimore (2011), Delaney (1996), Naar (2017), Solomon (2006) and Brogaard (2014).

¹⁹⁸ I will use the pronoun "him" whenever I refer to a beloved. I do this for several reasons. First, the literature on love commonly invokes male lovers loving female beloveds. I thought it would be refreshing to provide examples where this gets flipped. That is why Amal rather than George is our protagonist. Second, I use "him" in order to streamline the prose. If you prefer gender-neutral pronouns, please fill them in throughout the chapter. Note that even though I do use gendered pronouns, none of my examples should be construed as favoring heteronormativity or gender binarism.

¹⁹⁹ See Parfit (2011), Star (2015), and Portmore (2011). The principle is usually stated within the context of reasons for action. I am adopting these principles to govern reasons for attitudes generally speaking.

²⁰⁰ See Schroeder (2008), Way (2009), and Parfit (2011). This is a thesis about action-guiding deliberative rationality on which what it is rational for an agent to do is sensitive to her information. See Howard (forthcoming) who cites Broome, Dancy, Kiesewetter, Lord, Mason, Ross, Scanlon and Zimmerman who accept a similar view of rationality.

To see the problem, let's suppose that Amal is interested in only loving one person.²⁰¹ If we accept the three theses above, Amal's love for George turns out to be irrational. First, according to the Quality view, Amal knows facts about Nayla that are genuine and weighty normative reasons to love her. Second, according to **Basic Possession**, Amal possesses those reasons to love Nayla. Since, we've also stipulated that Nayla has better qualities than George, Amal seems to possess more reason to love Nayla over George. Given Rationality, it is irrational for Amal to continue loving George.

Amal's case is a colorful way of illustrating a phenomenon that we are all familiar with. Most of us know of other people with great qualities. Yet, many of us don't start loving those people. If the above theses are correct, then it seems that most of us are being irrational. This worry is commonly referred to as the Trading Up Problem. We can put it in the form of a question:

Trading Up Problem: If we know of people with better qualities than our beloveds, how can it be rational for us to continue loving our beloveds?

A popular strategy for answering the question is to reject the Quality View. The loveable qualities of a beloved aren't reasons to love him. In fact, the Trading Up Problem is thought to be a decisive objection against the Quality View.²⁰²

I claim otherwise. The qualities of a beloved *are* weighty (though not the only) reasons to love him. We do love our beloveds, in part, for their qualities and those qualities

²⁰¹ I make this assumption so that the inconsistency is clear. That said, I want to leave ethical polyamory as a live option. It can be rational and morally permissible to romantically love multiple people. In 4.4, I discuss polyamory and why it is not precluded by Rationality. For excellent discussion on ethical polyamory, see Jenkins (2017).

²⁰² For example, Frankfurt (2004), Zangwill (2013), and Smuts (draft) take the Trading Up Problem as reason to believe that there are no reasons for love.

do favor loving him. Since reasons, by definition, count in favor of actions or attitudes, such qualities would count as reasons. The cost of rejecting the Quality View involves rejecting commonsense intuitions as well as a standard definition of reasons.²⁰³

Fortunately, we don't have to pay such a cost. In this chapter, I propose a new defense of the Quality View against the Trading Up Problem. Jollimore (2011) accepts the Quality View but argues that love's reasons are exempt from Rationality.²⁰⁴ Kolodny (2003) and Naar (2015) accept Rationality by positing non-quality-based relationship-based reasons for love. By positing these reasons, most cases of love satisfy Rationality on their views.²⁰⁵

These existing accounts either require treating loving attitudes in some way an exception to other general theories of rational attitudes or they lead to counterintuitive results. In this chapter, I will defend the Quality View by defending a new account of love's reasons and rationality that does not require such exceptionalism. The account does justice to important ways in which we form, maintain and evaluate loving relationships. Unlike existing accounts in the literature, it also gives supporters rational guidance in addressing victims of abusive or co-dependent relationships. My strategy is to reject **Basic Possession** in favor of a better account of reasons possession (i.e. **Possession**). On my Experience-

²⁰³ Few philosophers reject the Quality View outright. They usually supplement it with additional non-quality-based reasons for love. That said, Setiya denies that every other quality except for humanity is a (non-insistent) reason for love.

²⁰⁴ Some opponents of the Quality View such as Velleman (1999) and Setiya (2014) also reject Rationality. More precisely, they don't reject Rationality *tout court*. Instead, they reject the claim that reasons for love can be stronger or weightier than one another. In other words, love's reasons are *exempt* from Rationality.

²⁰⁵ There are two versions of this view. The first posits the existence of a relationship as itself a reason for love. Kolodny (2003) and Howard (forthcoming), and Setiya (2014) are sympathetic to this approach. Another version proposed in Kolodny (2003) and Naar (2017) claims that a relationship is a necessary condition for one to possess the qualities of a beloved as reasons to love them. This second version is on the right track. Rather than appealing to relationships however, I appeal to experience as a necessary condition for possessing the quality of a beloved as reasons to love them. I discuss this in section 4.1.4.

Commitment Account of love's reasons and rationality, we usually do possess more reason to love our beloveds than to love others. This is because (a) experiencing a beloved's qualities is a necessary condition for possessing them as reasons for love²⁰⁶ and (b) love involves a commitment to manage the reasons we possess such that we tend to possess more reason to love our beloveds than to love others. Such a theory of rational love does not require us to reject plausible views about love's reasons such as the Quality View nor does it require us to make love's reasons exempt from Rationality. Instead, if we must introduce complexities, they should reside in what is genuinely complex: *how* we love.

In section 4.1, I give a general characterization of love and argue against love non-rationalism. I also consider the claim that reasons for love cannot be weighed against one another and discuss the shortcomings of appealing to relationship-based reasons. In section 4.2, I defend my Experience-Commitment Account. In section 4.3, I consider the advantages of my account and distinguish it from its rivals including Jollimore's (2011) account defended in *Love's Vision* – the most thorough treatment of the Trading Up Problem to date. I consider remaining objections in section 4.4.

²⁰⁶ I say more about experience in 4.2. In particular, I note that the contents of experience can include complex properties that are not perceived by the traditional sensory modalities (e.g. experiencing someone's moral character or intellect).

4.1 Characterizing Romantic Love

4.1.1 Preliminaries

We start with a general characterization of romantic love. Love consists of at least the following two components: (1) an evaluative attitude associated with characteristic symptoms and (2) a disposition to prioritize the beloved in practical deliberation.²⁰⁷

Love, similar to evaluative attitudes such as appreciation and admiration, is responsive to normative reasons/values and subject to our control.²⁰⁸²⁰⁹ This attitude is associated with a number of symptoms. Love, *qua* evaluative attitude is often accompanied by intense emotions especially at its inception.²¹⁰ It is also symptomatically accompanied by certain judgments, actions, or relationships though the presence of these things is not required. Lovers don't have to be conceptually sophisticated and they are sometimes not in the position to act or form relationships with their beloved.

²⁰⁷ This approach is similar to the syndrome analysis of hope offered in Martin (2014). What I aim to capture here is the bare minimum. Presumably there are theories of love that add to this (e.g. love requires union with the beloved, a desire for her well-being etc.). Perhaps such claims are true. My response to the Trading Up Problem and my own positive account do not conflict with these claims.

²⁰⁸ Again, by evaluative attitude, I mean an attitude that is responsive to values or reasons. Aesthetic appreciation, for example, is responsive to aesthetic values or reasons such as beauty, elegance, simplicity, etc. By claiming that love is an evaluative attitude, I am claiming that love is responsive to values or reasons related to its object. Such values or reasons includes the qualities of a beloved. See Howard (forthcoming) and Jollimore (2011) for similar claims.

²⁰⁹ You may be skeptical that love is under our control. I say more in section 4.1.2 and 4.2.3. Furthermore, this is a legitimate assumption for our purposes. First, I point out in the main text that love *qua* evaluative attitude is accompanied by but distinct from symptoms that are arguably less under our control (e.g. emotions). Second, while philosophers working on the Trading Up Problem may differ on the degree to which love is under our control, no one doubts that we have an ability to choose who to *romantically* love. In section 4.2.3., I claim that this ability to choose consists in our ability to commit to our beloveds by managing our reasons in favor of loving them.

²¹⁰ For the view that emotions are just felt bodily evaluative attitudes, see Deonna and Teroni (2012).

Second, love is also partly constituted by a disposition to prioritize the beloved in practical deliberation. The lover is typically more sensitive to the needs of the beloved than others and is thus more likely to feel and act on his behalf.²¹¹ This disposition, as we shall see, is the result of a key component in my account of love: a commitment to managing one's possessed reasons in favor of the beloved.

Third, even though I accept the Quality View (a beloved's qualities are reasons for love), I reject the following thesis:²¹²

Strict Quality View: The only normative reasons for love are the loveable qualities of the beloved.

A plausible account of love should grant that there are reasons for love that go beyond the loveable qualities of the beloved. In agreement with Naar and Kolodny, there are relational facts or qualities such as the existence of a valuable relationship or shared history that could also provide reasons for love.²¹³ I grant that such reasons are part of (though not the entire) explanation as to why we don't possess more reason to love others over our beloveds.

²¹¹ See Jollimore (2011).

²¹² Howard (forthcoming) rejects the following thesis as well: He defends the claim that the beloved's qualities provide *fit-based* reasons for love but also grants that there are also other reasons for love too.

²¹³ See Howard (forthcoming) for discussion of whether relational properties can provide reasons for love. I accept that relational or non-intrinsic properties can provide non-fittingness/non-quality-based reasons for love. I note this issue because Setiya has pointed out that since all reasons have requiring strength (requiring reasons for short) on the Experience-Commitment Account, if a beloved were cloned, the clone's qualities would be requiring reasons to love the clone. First, while qualities are requiring reasons, the fact that a beloved was cloned can count against loving it. Second, most properties, including the qualities of a beloved, are probably relational properties – properties that cannot be instantiated by the clone. Third, suppose that the lover requested to clone her deceased beloved or that she started loving the clone before she realized it wasn't actually her beloved. It's not at all clear how the clone's qualities would thereby lack requiring strength. Finally, to foreshadow 1.3 and 1.4, this objection is used to motivate either the Enticing Reasons Account (qualities merely entice but never require love) or the Relationship Account (relationships are required for qualities to be reasons). I argue that the Experience-Commitment Account is preferable in sections 4.3 and 4.4.

Finally, when considering examples in which a lover encounters someone with better qualities than her beloved, I am not committed to an objective betterness ranking for all qualities for all people. Perhaps moral qualities can be ranked objectively but the ranking of physical qualities such as beauty or intellectual qualities such as wit may depend on the qualities or preferences of the lover. This may explain away some cases of trading up (e.g. just because we find Nayla more physically attractive than George, this does not entail that for Amal, Nayla's physical qualities are better than George's). Nonetheless, all that is needed to generate the examples we'll consider is that there can be people with better qualities on either an objective or partially subjective ranking.

4.1.2 Love Non-Rationalism

Pace Frankfurt, love is rational in at least a weak sense. If love were non-rational, then we would expect far fewer attempts to engage in practical reasoning about it. Instead, the exact opposite is true. Many of us think carefully about who we date and seek advice on the matter from those we trust. Second, if love were altogether non-rational, we would expect it to be an inappropriate subject for blame or praise. However, we do praise people for their love. While blaming people for their love is rare, blame may perhaps be appropriate when a lover continues to love someone who is genuinely awful.²¹⁴ Love non-rationalism either precludes or makes it much harder for us to make such judgments.

Nevertheless, we should consider some of the non-rationalist's points. First, if love were rational, wouldn't we be able to articulate our reasons for love? In response, while it is

²¹⁴ These cases, especially ones involving abuse, call for sensitivity. I address them in detail in section 4.3.1.

true that most people can't articulate their reasons for loving someone, it does not follow that love is outside our evaluative control or irresponsive to reasons just because we can't articulate them. It is true that we're more likely to say, "these are the qualities that I love about my beloved" as opposed to the more awkward "here are the reasons why I love my beloved."²¹⁵ But this is not a problem for rationalism about love. The fact that the latter answer is awkward gives us a *pragmatic* reason to refrain from answering this way.

Nevertheless, awkwardness is not good *evidence* that the qualities of a beloved aren't reasons for love. More importantly, love need not require specific beliefs or judgments. Love can involve emotional and physiological mechanisms that are responsive to the features of the beloved even if one is unable to articulate judgments about the beloved.²¹⁶

Second, if love were rational, then why does it often feel uncontrollable — like an addiction to one's beloved? Admittedly, in the early stages of romantic love, the cocaine addict and the lover have surprisingly similar brain chemistries.²¹⁷ But even if this is the case, feelings of addiction and lack of control are better associated with infatuation than love. Even if there are periods in which love feels out of our control, this does not mean that love in general is out of our control.²¹⁸ We fall out of love with sexy jerks and remain in love with

²¹⁵ Setiya (2014) makes this point.

²¹⁶ See Deonna and Teroni (2013) who provide an account of emotions as felt bodily attitudes that captures the point just made. Second, by divorcing love from any particular judgments, this makes it possible for those who aren't conceptually sophisticated to love others.

²¹⁷ See Brogaard (2014) and Jenkins (2017) for a summary of the neurobiology of romantic love.

²¹⁸ The relevant notion of control is evaluative control. See Hieronymi (2006). We evaluatively control attitudes by dropping or forming them in response to the reasons that justify them. A classic example is belief formation in response to evidence.

our shabby hobbies. It does not follow from the fact that love can initially feel out of control that it must be out of our evaluative control altogether.

Finally, one might object that when an action or attitude is subject to rational assessment, agents subject their attitudes or actions to re-evaluation when given new information. However, love seems resistant to this kind of re-evaluation.²¹⁹ In response, we already accept that certain forms of love are resistant to rational re-evaluation. If a mother asks whether it is appropriate to love her child by examining her child's qualities, something is amiss. While parental love is not the same as romantic love and is responsive to other facts (e.g. on whether you are that person's parent), romantic love is less restrictive but no less rational. It's just responsive to other facts such as the beloved's qualities.²²⁰ Lastly, the Experience-Commitment Account I propose in section 4.2 provides a solution to the Trading Up Problem that also explains love's constancy.

4.1.3 Appealing to Enticing Reasons

Some philosophers working on the Trading Up Problem exempt love from Rationality by appealing to a certain theory of reasons' weight.²²¹ On the *monist* theory of reasons' weight, though reasons provide different degrees of normative support for actions or options, there is only one type of normative support. All reasons possess a weight that

²¹⁹ Zangwill (2013) and Smuts (draft) provide this kind of argument.

²²⁰ To preview, I explain how love can be resistant to constant re-evaluation by claiming that lovers manage their reasons in favor of their beloveds. I discuss this in section 4.2.3.

²²¹ Setiya (p.c.) has pointed out to me that philosophers adopting this approach don't reject Rationality *tout court* but only reject that it applies to love.

can be factored into determining what an agent ought to do. Little thinks that this monist theory of reasons' weight implies an alienating picture of rational agency:²²²

On this view, agency is about responding to the determinations of reasons, and reasons don't determine until they necessitate. If we find pockets of latitude in life, it is only where those necessities can be equally well satisfied by different options, like the two piles of hay facing Buridan's ass that would equally satisfy the need for food.

To reject this notion of rational agency, some philosophers have adopted a dualist theory of reasons' weight. On this dualist theory, some reasons have a weight that can get factored into standard weighing explanations of what an agent ought to do (e.g. an agent ought to do what they have weightiest/most reason to do). However, there are other reasons that support or commend actions without possessing a weight that figures in such standard weighing explanations. These reasons have been called 'enticing', 'non-deontic' or 'non-insistent' reasons.²²³ In Gert's (2003) terminology, such reasons have significant 'justifying' but no 'requiring' strength. Though there are differences between these notions, for the sake of simplicity, I'll call this strategy the Enticing Reasons Account.

This strategy is controversial. It complicates existing theories of reasons' weight and makes it harder for us to make coherent sense of claims about what agents have most reason to do.²²⁴ Nonetheless, it is motivated by several considerations. First, appealing to enticing reasons seems to help us understand supererogation (i.e. actions that have much in favor of the but are not required). Second, positing enticing reasons can help us understand why even

²²² Little (2013, 117) attributes Raz for discussion of this conception of agency.

²²³ Dancy (2003), Little (2013), and Setiya (2014) respectively.

²²⁴ For further discussion of drawbacks, see Robertson (2008). See Gert (2016) for a response.

though there are many valuable personal projects, we are never required to pursue any specific project.

Most importantly for our discussion, the Enticing Reasons Account seems to provide a solution to the Trading Up Problem. Jollimore (2011) has argued that the qualities of a beloved are reasons to love them, but no set of an individual's qualities can rationally require loving that individual.²²⁵ Similarly, Setiya has argued that the humanity of an individual is the only (though merely enticing) reason for love. If a person's qualities are merely enticing reasons for love, then it can never be the case that they can require us to trade up. Rationality does not apply to love. The Trading Up Problem is solved.

Those who appeal to enticing reasons are right to point out the following:

Optional Reasons Support: Though all reasons are capable of favoring action, not all of them must determine what an agent ought to do.

In agreement, I believe that in order to solve the Trading Up Problem and to account for cases of supererogation and permission, we need to appeal to something like the thesis above. But we can do better. Ideally, what we want is an account of love's reasons that (i) accounts for Optional Reasons Support while appealing to a more theoretically conservative account of reasons' weight, and (ii) makes accurate predictions about when love can be irrational. I discuss how the Experience-Commitment Account, which holds a monist theory of reasons' weight, satisfies these desiderata in section 4.3.1.

²²⁵ This is a paraphrase of what Jollimore (2011, 14) calls the Incompleteness Thesis. Also, Jollimore (2011, 93-94) appeals to enticing reasons when he writes "In particular, it is necessary to understand the way in which values generate reasons that render certain objects or options *eligible* for choice without making it *mandatory* that agents select those particular options."

4.1.4 Appealing to Relationship-Based Reasons

In order to block the Trading Up Problem, Kolodny (2003) and Naar (2017) appeal to relationships. On their approach, in virtue of the fact that the lover is in a valuable relationship with her beloved, she usually has more reason to love her beloved than to love others. We can call this strategy the Relationship Account. While the most recent version of this approach by Naar (2017) faces problems, it contains a crucial insight that I will appeal to in my own positive account.

Naar (2017) claims that the intrinsic qualities of a beloved become reasons for love only within the context of an actual shared history or relationship. In order to defend the claim that we do not possess more reason to love someone else besides our beloved, we have to set substantive conditions on what it takes to possess a reason for love. While Naar does not state this line of thinking explicitly, his idea of subject-relative reasons amounts to positing the existence of a relationship as a necessary condition on possessing reasons for love. Since we don't have relationships with hypothetical lovers, we don't possess their qualities as reasons for love. The Trading Up Problem is solved.

Unfortunately, the view has similar problems to other relationship-based views already discussed in the literature. First, it has the troubling result that if a victim loves her co-dependent abuser, she may fail to have meaningful relationships with others and thus fail to possess reasons to trade up. Similar problems arise if we make relationship-based reasons too strong. If they're strong enough to resist trading up generally, they can presumably resist trading up even in cases of abuse.²²⁶ Second, we're still left with no explanation as to how it

²²⁶ In section 4.3.2, I discuss how the Experience-Commitment Account gives plausible practical advice both to victims in abusive or co-dependent relations and the supporters of these victims.

is rational for someone like Amal to love George even when no relationship exists. Finally, even if one is suspicious of rational love at first sight, the Relationship Account simply rules it out.²²⁷ Nonetheless, the appeal to relationships is on the right track. We should grant that the existence of a relationship is a reason for love. But more importantly, Naar is right to point out that we need to reconsider what it takes to possess a reason for love. The Experience-Commitment Account which I now present does just that.

4.2 The Experience-Commitment Account of Love's Reasons and Rationality

Recall the question we are trying to answer:

Trading Up Problem: If we know of people with better qualities than our beloved, how can it be rational for us to continue loving our beloveds?

If Super Tinder makes us aware of other people with even better qualities than our beloved, given **Basic Possession** and **Rationality**, how can we rationally love the people we do now? The Experience-Commitment Account addresses this question directly. It consists of two claims:

Loving Experience: A lover possesses more reason to love her beloved than others because experience is a necessary condition for possessing a person's loveable qualities as reasons for love.

Loving Commitment: A lover commits to her beloved by actively managing the reasons she possesses to love her beloved, ensuring that she possesses more reason to love her beloved than to love others.

²²⁷ For further discussion (criticism) of the Relationship Account and a defense of rational love at first sight, see Setiya (2014). I point out in 4.3.4 that it is theoretically ad hoc to posit the existence of a relationship as a necessary condition on reasons possession is theoretically ad hoc. I also discuss how the Experience-Commitment Account has more resources to resist trading up than the Relationship Account in the response to objection 2 in section 4.4.

These two claims jointly explain why most people rationally love their beloveds.

4.2.1 Loving Experience

A key assumption thus far is that what it is rational for us to do is a function of our possessed reasons. But when we carefully consider the reasons we actually possess within the context of love, we do possess more reason to love our beloveds than to love others. In particular, I argue that **Basic Possession** is false. It needs to be replaced with a principle that takes experience seriously as a necessary condition for possessing certain reasons.²²⁸

First, let us assume that **Basic Possession** is true without modification. Even so, we often *do* possess most reason to love our beloveds. Why? First, if we are in a relationship with a person, that may already provide additional non-quality-based reasons to love that person. Of course, this doesn't work in the case of Amal and George where no such relationship exists. Nonetheless, Amal can still possess more reason to love George than to love Nayla even in these circumstances. Why? Because even if what it takes to possess a person's qualities as reasons for love is just knowledge of those qualities, Amal simply *knows* more of George's qualities. Regular and intimate contact with a person allows us to learn many facts about that person's physical features and character traits that can't be had without such contact. We know how our beloved smells, how his hair parts messily in the morning, and how he awkwardly smiles after he realizes he was being insensitive. Super Tinder does not provide us with these facts. If so, then Amal does possess more reason to love George than Amal.

²²⁸ See 2.2 for more detailed discussion.

One might object that simply having more reasons does not mean having weightier reasons.²²⁹ We can illustrate the worry with Amal again. If we individuated reasons as facts, it's true that Amal possesses more reasons to love George numerically speaking, but it could still be the case that Super Tinder provides Amal with weightier reasons to love Nayla. Perhaps it provides evidence that Nayla is prettier, funnier, and all-around a better person than George. Perhaps this evidence is decisive, and you thereby possess more reason to love Nayla. Isn't this enough to show that Amal's love for George is irrational?

To address this objection and defend Loving Experience, I propose we reject **Basic Possession** in favor of a principle that takes experience seriously as a condition on possessing reasons. If this is correct, it's not the case that Amal possesses many reasons to love George, but Super Tinder also provides many reasons to love Nayla. Instead, Amal possesses many reasons to love George, but Super Tinder provides *little to no reason* to love Nayla that Amal can actually possess. Issues concerning reasons' weight don't even arise.

To see why **Basic Possession** must be rejected and replaced, let's recall what it says:

Basic Possession: What it is for agent A to possess reason R to φ provided by fact F is for A to know F and for R to be a reason to φ .

Recall that on Rationality, what it is rational for you to do is determined by your possessed reasons. If possessed reasons play this role in determining what it is rational for you to do, then you should be able to practically deliberate from your possessed reasons to conclusions

²²⁹ For example, the weight of reasons is not always additive and double counting is possible. See Maguire and Lord (2016) for discussion of various issues concerning the weight of reasons.

about what it is rational for you to do.²³⁰ But if this is correct, then **Basic Possession** is false.

The explanation is that even if you know some fact that is a normative reason for an action or attitude, in some cases, you can still fail to know how to use it in your practical deliberation. For example, even if you know that a certain pasta on the menu is *al dente* and you like pasta with a slightly chewy texture, you might have no idea what *al dente* means. In this case, just knowing the fact can't help you determine whether you ought to order that pasta. You don't possess the fact – that the pasta is *al dente* – as a reason to order it because you don't know how to deliberate from that fact to the practical conclusion of ordering it off the menu.

In order to account for these cases, let's recall Lord's account of reasons possession from chapter 2:

Possession: What it is for agent A to possess reason R to φ provided by fact F is for A to be in a position to manifest knowledge about how to use R to φ .²³¹

Lord's core idea is that in order to possess a reason, you have to not only know a fact but also know how to use it in one's practical deliberation. This updated principle accurately predicts that you don't possess the *al dente* fact as a reason for you to order it off the menu. It turns out that how one epistemically and practically relates to a fact can affect whether one can deliberate with and thus possesses it as a reason for action. This same issue applies to a beloved's qualities as reasons for love.

²³⁰ For detailed arguments of this claim, see Lord (2018) and Asarnow (2016) and 2.1

²³¹ Lord (2018, 124). See 2.1 for detailed discussion. See Sylvan (draft) and Sosa (2016) for defenses of the idea that possessing an objective reason for belief is a kind of epistemic achievement.

To see why, first note that Updated Possession applies not just to reasons for action but also reasons for evaluative attitudes in general. Even if you dislike the pasta example, consider evaluative attitudes such as aesthetic appreciation.²³² Suppose your art historian colleague testifies that you have reason to appreciate a newly discovered Picasso. You've never seen it. Even though your colleague may be right, and, in virtue of this testimony, you do possess some reason to appreciate the Picasso, it also seems right to say that you don't possess many reasons to appreciate this painting just from her testimony alone. Why is this so? Because you haven't seen the painting! The weightiest reasons one can possess to appreciate a piece of art are its aesthetic qualities – *qualities that you possess as reasons only if you experience them yourself*. Without this experience, simply being told that the painting has these qualities is not enough for you to appreciate it. You can use this fact to deliberate about whether *to go see it*. However, you don't actually possess the qualities of the painting as reasons you can deliberate with in order *to appreciate it* until you've seen it for yourself. Our suspicion with second-hand aesthetic (and even moral) appreciation confirms this diagnosis.

The same reasoning applies to love. Love is an evaluative attitude similar to aesthetic appreciation. It is responsive to reasons, some of which – the qualities of a beloved – figure in our practical deliberation only if we've experienced them. In other words, experience is a necessary condition for possessing the qualities of a beloved as reasons to love them.²³³ If

²³² You might dislike it because you think that the agent's failure to possess the *al dente* fact is not due to her ignorance of how to use it. Instead, it's because she fails to know the *al dente* fact *tout court* because she doesn't know what *al dente* means. This reminds us of Kripke's puzzle about belief (1979). However, note that this move cannot be made in the context of aesthetic reasons or reasons for love. It's not the case that we don't know what it means when someone tells us that some suitor is beautiful or intelligent. What I want to claim is that just as knowing the meaning of some fact is a prerequisite for possessing it as a reason, so does experiencing some quality is a prerequisite for knowing (and thus possessing) it as a reason. I use this claim in the next few paragraphs to defend Loving Experience.

²³³ Suppose you aren't convinced by this because you think that just being told that someone is beautiful is enough for you to possess this fact as a reason for love. Even if you don't want to have a more

this is correct, then whether Amal is rational in loving George over Nayla depends importantly on how Super Tinder actually works. If Super Tinder immerses Amal in a virtual simulation that allows her to interact with a 100% physically and mentally accurate duplicate of Nayla for a prolonged period of time, then *maybe* Amal may possess most reason to love Nayla instead. However, Super Tinder, as I've described it is far closer to actual Tinder. It won't provide Amal with decisive possessed reasons to love Nayla over George.

Given the importance of experience in my approach to reasons possession, we should be more precise. In appealing to experience, we shouldn't think that the proper contents of experience can only be simple properties such as colors, scents, or sounds.²³⁴ Nor should we privilege sensory modalities as the only source of our experiences. Perhaps one can experience a complex propositional content through cognitive reflection. Perhaps such an experience allows you to possess its content as a reason even if you don't learn it under the traditional sensory modalities (i.e. touch, smell, etc.).²³⁵ For example, it could be possible for me to experience the intellect, humor, or moral character of a person by interacting with their literary estate. So long as certain qualities of a person can only be possessed as reasons after experiencing them under a traditional sensory modality or perhaps through cognitive reflection as opposed to testimony or experiencing some simulacrum of

complicated view of reasons possession, if you grant that experiencing the qualities of a person affords you with additional knowledge that you didn't have before when you were just told about that person's qualities, you now possess more reasons to love that person. If this is correct, then you have more possessed reason to love people you actually experience. That claim is all I need to motivate Loving Experience.

²³⁴ For discussion of possible contents of experience, see Siegel (2010).

²³⁵ For discussion of whether entertaining a proposition may have a distinctive cognitive phenomenology, see Kriegel (2015).

them, we can explain why Amal possesses more reason to love George than Nayla or any hypothetical suitor.

At this point, one might object that Super Tinder can still provide Amal with a possessed reason that decisively favors loving Nayla. Suppose Super Tinder provides the following piece of direct non-qualitative information: there is more reason for Amal to love Nayla instead of George. This fact is presumably something that Amal can fully possess without experience. If Amal possesses this fact as a reason, and thus can deliberate with this fact, does rationality require her to now love Nayla?

We can respond to the objection in two ways. First, perhaps in some cases, just knowing that I have more reason to do something provides me with decisive possessed reason to do it. For example, I know nothing about kitchenware. Suppose you tell me that there is most reason to buy a Le Creuset over a Circulon pan. On the basis of your testimony, I may now possess decisive reason to buy the Le Creuset even if I don't know anything about either pan.²³⁶ Perhaps this is correct for consumer decisions, but we should be skeptical that Super Tinder can provide me with *knowledge* that I have more reason to love someone else in the same way that you can provide me with *knowledge* that I should buy the Le Creuset. Unlike knowledge about kitchen appliances which can be gained through testimony, knowledge about who I have most reason to love may only be gained through substantive experience. Now suppose Super Tinder lets you interact with your suitor in a

²³⁶ Schroeder (2007) provides a case similar in structure. Nate is told by his trustworthy friend that he has most reason to go home (because there is a surprise birthday party). In this case, since Nate has *knowledge* about what he has most reason to do, he might possess this fact about his reasons as a decisive reason to go home even if he fails to know what those reasons are.

nearly indistinguishable virtual reality.²³⁷ If Super Tinder worked this way, perhaps Super Tinder is just a high-tech form of dating. This is no problem for Loving Experience. If you meet someone genuinely better than your beloved, the Experience-Commitment Account suggests you should trade up.²³⁸

Now suppose that some omniscient matchmaker or dating application really can tell Amal that there is more reason to love Nayla than to love George. Suppose this testimony counts as knowledge for Amal – knowledge that can be gained without experiencing Nayla whatsoever. Even if all this is the case, it may still be rational for Amal to love George because she is actually aware of specific reasons for doing so. She has no such awareness of the specific reasons to love Nayla.

The above is possible because Amal can rationally respond more to reasons she is aware of *de re*. Though we shouldn't be suspicious of *de dicto* motivation in general, it may still be rational for us to respond more to reasons with a certain weight than to the fact that there are reasons with that weight. Setiya defends this explicitly:

Specificity: It can be rational to respond more strongly to a fact that is a reason with a certain weight than to the fact that there is a reason with that weight.²³⁹

A potential upshot of this principle is that even if you know that *there is* most reason to favor some option B, it may be rational to respond more strongly to the reasons you

²³⁷ For example, even in the Black Mirror episode *Hang the DJ* where a dating app simulates matches, the real matched lovers who were simulated by the application still go on a date rather than get hitched solely on the basis of the application.

²³⁸ One might worry about the wonderful people we meet besides our beloved. Since we experience their qualities, couldn't that make loving our beloveds irrational? I address this worry in the next sub section and in the response to objection 2 in section 4.

²³⁹ See Setiya (2016, 12).

possess to favor A. Applied to the present context, this means that it can be rational for Amal to respond more strongly to George's qualities as reasons with weight x than to the fact that Nayla has qualities which are reasons with some weight $x + n$. If Specificity is true, then it could still be rational for Amal to love George as opposed to Nayla.²⁴⁰ Even if you reject Specificity, my previous response concerning the implausibility of these kinds of cases still stands.²⁴¹

4.2.2 Loving Commitment

While most cases of love can fend off any hypothetical suitor with fantastic qualities that we've never met, this is not enough to show that *most* cases of love are rational. Super Tinder was never the real problem. The real problem is all the wonderful people that many of us get to interact with or will get a chance to interact with at some point! Updated Possession and Specificity is of no help in these cases. If we're surrounded by wonderful people that we possess reason to love, what could possibly guarantee that we possess more reason to love our beloveds? Answer: *We do*.

I've stressed that love consists of an evaluative attitude that is responsive to the qualities of the beloved and is generally under our control. But recall in section 4.1.1. that love partly consists in a disposition to prioritize the beloved in practical deliberation. This

²⁴⁰ Setiya motivates the principle by using it to diagnose a number of phenomena. For example, we tend to form regrets around mid-life not because we didn't know that some life paths will not be taken when we were young. We always knew that. Instead, it's because in mid-life, we know exactly what those forgone paths *are*. According to Specificity, it is rational for us to respond to facts which are reasons with a certain weight than the fact that there is reason with a certain weight. In this case, Setiya predicts that life regret is more rational when we grow older because it's only then that we know what those forgone paths actually are.

²⁴¹ Even if you are unconvinced by what I had to say about reasons possession, what I will say about managing our reasons in the next subsection may be sufficient, on its own, to solve the Trading Up Problem.

disposition, I propose comes about as the result of a conscious effort by lovers to *manage* the reasons they possess in favor of loving their beloveds.

If many of the weighty reasons we possess to love people are their qualities, and what it takes to possess those qualities involves experiencing them for ourselves, then we can manage the reasons we possess by controlling the experiences we have. This control works in two ways. First, it involves deliberately paying attention to the qualities of our beloveds. Second, it involves limiting the attention we pay to the qualities of others who aren't our beloveds. Put in more technical jargon, lovers commit to their beloveds by managing their practical reasons in a way that tends to ensure their reasons to love their beloved outweighs the reasons they have to love other people.²⁴²²⁴³

Three observations motivate this account of reasons management. First, this form of practical reasons management fits with the idea that love is freely given. We shouldn't locate this freedom in a rejection of Rationality. Instead, this freedom resides in how we manage our practical reasons in favor of our beloved. This kind of management is frequently up to us. Just as we're typically not required to focus on certain valuable projects over others or

²⁴² Talk of commitment suggest parallels with Chang (2014). She claims that we can will a fact to be a reason. I think what Chang actually means is that we can increase the weight of an existing reason (e.g. a lover's qualities) by willing it to be our reason. If this were possible, then perhaps Chang has a solution to the Trading Up Problem. We will ourselves into possessing most reason to love our beloveds. Chang could be right, but her view has costs. Chang's answer would require a controversial metaphysical claim: the will can create reasons or increase their weight. My view does not. Instead, it makes a much more mundane but sensible claim. Lovers use their "will" to resist temptation and to focus on one's beloved. The will is plenty powerful without being able to create will-based reasons. See 2.4 detailed discussion.

²⁴³ Jollimore (2011, 25) writes along a similar line:

Loving someone is, in large part, a kind of positive, appreciative response to her in virtue of her attractive, desirable, or otherwise valuable properties. The way of seeing the beloved, and the world in which the beloved lives, places her at the center of the lover's field of vision. Loving, then, is in large part a matter of opening one's eyes to the beloved and thus of opening one's eyes to the world. Yet at the same time, *love requires us not to see, notice, dwell on, or be moved by certain aspects of the world* (my emphasis).

forced to engage in certain fields of inquiry, there usually aren't requirements on us to engage or refrain from the reasons management that I'm proposing when it comes to our love lives.²⁴⁴

Second, this account fits with actual romantic practice. When we love our beloveds, we take specific steps to solidify that love. We delete Tinder, stop sending flirty texts, and make sure we spend quality time with our beloveds. While we remain open to sharing experiences with friends and other loved ones, we begin to cut back on these interactions if they begin to significantly interfere with your romantic life.

Third, in engaging in this kind of reasons management, we have a ready explanation for why love partially consists in a disposition to prioritize the beloved in practical deliberation. By engaging in reasons management, we make sure that we are attentive to the qualities of our beloved and to his needs that is different from the attention we afford to others.

4.2.3 Recap

I've argued that we usually possess more reason to love our beloveds than any hypothetical lover on Tinder. What this does not answer is how we can rationally love our beloveds if we're lucky enough to be surrounded by wonderful people. My answer is that we engage in reasons management. In particular, we manage our experiences in a way that ensures that we possess most reason to love the people we do. Thus, we have a solution to the Trading Up Problem. Most cases of love are rational after all.

²⁴⁴ I motivate this claim in detail in section 4.3.2.

4.3 Exploring the Experience-Commitment Account

To better understand the Experience-Commitment Account, let's compare it to its rivals. In 3.1, I argue that while the Experience-Commitment Account and the Enticing Reasons Account shares a similar approach to solving the Trading Up Problem, the former is preferable. It appeals to a more theoretically conservative theory of reasons' weight and it makes better predictions concerning cases of irrational love. In 3.2, I consider the objection that while the Experience-Commitment Account keeps the letter of Rationality and can make better predictions, it violates Rationality's spirit precisely because it ignores Reality. The charge is simple: managing reasons is just ignoring reasons (i.e. rationalization). On the contrary, I argue that the account accords with Reality by respecting our actual commitments and cognitive limitations. Third, I show in 3.3 that while Jollimore also replaces Possession and proposes an account of love that emphasizes the lover's commitment, we substantively disagree as to the role commitment plays in love.²⁴⁵ I argue that my view is preferable. Finally, I highlight in 3.4 some additional advantages that the Experience-Commitment Account has over other accounts in the literature.

4.3.1 Advantages Over the Enticing Reasons Account

4.3.1.1 Theoretical Advantages

Recall the core insight behind the defenders of the Enticing Reasons Account.

Optional Reasons Support: Though all reasons are capable of favoring action, not all of them must determine what an agent ought to do.

²⁴⁵ Thanks to an anonymous commentator for pointing me to chapter 5 of Jollimore (2011).

To accommodate this insight, recall that on Rationality, reasons play a role in determining what an agent ought to do only when they are possessed. Some reasons can only be possessed if we experience the qualities that generate them. Agents can sometimes manage what reasons they possess by controlling what experiences they have. The Experience-Commitment Account applies this to a person's qualities as reasons for love. By managing her experiences, a lover can come to have most reason to love her beloved.

The Experience-Commitment Account explains how Optional Reasons Support is true without appealing to a dualist theory of reasons' weight. We just need to assume that we are sometimes permitted to satisfy or not satisfy the possession conditions for certain reasons. Since many in the literature already accept that there are possession conditions for reasons, making this additional assumption is more conservative than appealing to a dualist theory of reasons' weight.²⁴⁶

Second, appealing to reasons possession still allows us to accommodate the motivations for the Enticing Reasons Account. Recall that cases involving personal projects or supererogation seem up to us. These cases involve permissions to adopt certain projects or to act beyond what our duties require. Optional Reasons Support can help explain these permissions. While there are reasons to engage in any number of valuable projects or to help others, not all of these reasons must play a role in determining what we ought to do. This, as I've noted, is because (i) reasons play such a role only if we possess them, and (ii) we are

²⁴⁶ For a summary of this literature, see Lord (2018). For discussion in the epistemic domain, see Sylvan (draft). Jollimore (2011) discusses a version of possession *avant la lettre* in chapter 5.

sometimes permitted to manage our reasons, thereby possessing or avoiding possessing certain reasons.²⁴⁷

4.3.1.2 Irrational Love: Trading Up and Abuse

The Experience-Commitment Account also makes better predictions than the Enticing Reasons Account when we consider cases of irrational love. In some cases, even if you already have a romantic partner, you may find yourself thrown into an intimate setting with someone genuinely amazing in every way (e.g. moral character, attractiveness, etc.). In virtue of being in this intimate setting and going through experiences together (imagine the two of you are stuck in a deserted island and have to work together to survive), you come to experience this person's qualities, thereby possessing them as reasons for love. Suppose this person is now in love with you. If your former beloved is unreachable, merely decent, and you haven't made any commitments or formed a relationship with him, it would be irrational for you not to trade up! The Enticing Reasons Account cannot provide such a verdict if the qualities of a beloved merely entice but never require or determine what you ought to do.

The proponent of enticing reasons may balk at the former possibility, but she should tread carefully. The Enticing Reasons Account has a much harder time dealing with love in the context of abusive or co-dependent relationships. In many cases of physically or emotionally abusive love, victims ought to stop loving their abusers. As supporters of these victims, we need to be cautious. Sometimes, these victims possess their abusers' negative

²⁴⁷ See chapter 2.4 for details.

qualities as reasons to stop loving them but are failing to be fully rational by ignoring them.²⁴⁸ However, this is not always the case. Abusive or co-dependent relationships are especially harmful because they can often blind the victim to the negative qualities of their abusers. In either case, a good account of love should allow supporters to provide victims with reasons that can make it irrational for them to keep loving their abusers – reasons the victim can eventually see for herself as justifying withdrawal from her abuser. On the Experience-Commitment Account, supporters can either remind victims of reasons they already possess to stop loving their abusers or make victims aware of such reasons. Because the Experience-Commitment Account maintains a monistic theory of reasons' weight, the negative qualities of an abuser, once possessed by the victim, *are* reasons that determine (rather than merely entice or permit) the attitudes or actions she ought to adopt. These victims usually possess most reason to stop loving their beloveds.

The proponent of enticing reasons will have a more difficult time reaching this verdict. If the qualities of a beloved are enticing reasons, then presumably so are the negative qualities of the beloved. But if such reasons cannot require action or determine what an agent ought to do, then even if supporters remind victims of such reasons, they cannot claim that such reasons can make loving an abuser irrational. The Enticing Reasons Account entails that loving one's abuser is permissible.

One might think that this is the right result because anyone should be permitted to love anyone – even victims and abusers. However, there are better ways of accommodating this intuition without insisting that *romantic* love is rationally permissible in abuse cases. What

²⁴⁸ Note, even if these victims are failing to be fully rational, blame may be inappropriate. Even granting a tight connection between reasons responsiveness and blame, there may be necessary conditions for appropriate blame that are not met given the nature of abuse and the specific circumstances of the case.

seems more plausible is that while romantic love is rationally impermissible in such cases, it may be rationally permissible for a victim to show respect, good will, or some other form of love towards her abuser. The Experience-Commitment Account leaves room for this while also giving supporters of the victim rational leverage to cite reasons that *require* the victim to stop romantically loving her abuser.

If the proponent of enticing reasons wants to claim that loving an abuser, or at least staying with him, can be irrational, she has two options. First, she can defend an asymmetry: while positive qualities only entice, negative qualities can require. It is now incumbent on the defender of enticing reasons to provide a systematic explanation for this asymmetry.

The second option involves appealing to the claim that love is distinct from particular relationships or actions. The victim is still permitted to love her abuser, but she may have most reason to no longer show partiality or be in a relationship with him. I'm sympathetic to this strategy. However, even if love is distinct from any particular action or relationship, they tend to go together. Romantic love and partiality are psychologically stable when they are mutually reinforcing. It is a strike against an account of love if it cannot predict that a lover's reasons for love will eventually align with her reasons for action. While the Experience-Commitment Account can appeal to this strategy and still make such predictions, the Enticing Reasons Account cannot.

In some worst-case scenarios, a victim may come to possess most reason to love her abuser through reasons management (e.g. by closing herself off to others) and other non-quality-based reasons (e.g. shared history, being in a relationship, having a child together, etc.). The Experience-Commitment Account provides plausible advice for such victims. Given that love can be distinct from specific actions or relationships, the victim may possess most reason to leave her abuser while possessing most reason to love him. Supporters of the

victim should tell the victim to respond to her reasons for action and leave her abuser. In doing so, she will eventually possess reasons to love someone else. With respect to the abuser, the victim's reasons for love will initially be misaligned with her reasons for action. However, once the victim leaves her abuser, she can come to love a new beloved in a psychologically stable way – her reasons for love will eventually align with her reasons for action.

On the Enticing Reasons Account, because qualities cannot rationally require or forbid love, the victim is rationally permitted to love her abuser while possessing most reason to leave him. Note, even if the victim comes to possess reasons to love someone else after leaving her abuser, she is still permitted to love her abuser instead. If the victim continues to love her abuser, her love will be psychologically unstable: she continues to love her abuser while simultaneously possessing most reason to refrain from being in a relationship with or to show partiality towards him. The Enticing Reasons Account cannot explain why there will be rational pressure for the victim to replace this psychologically unstable state for something more stable. The Experience-Commitment Account can. It predicts that once the victim leaves her abuser, she will possess reasons to love someone else – reasons that can now make it irrational for her to continue loving her abuser. Thus, there will be rational pressure for the victim to abandon her abuser and to pursue a psychologically stable form of love.

The Experience-Commitment Account plausibly predicts that we should trade up when we meet someone genuinely incredible or find ourselves stuck with someone genuinely awful. But one might worry that the account does not have adequate resources to resist trading up in much milder cases where one's beloved has lost some of his qualities or when one meets someone slightly better. We will consider these cases in section 4.4.

4.3.2 Responding to Reality: Rationality in Letter and Spirit

The Experience-Commitment Account captures normative reality better than the Enticing Reasons Account by making better predictions in the previous cases. However, one might worry that the Experience-Commitment Account actually ignores reality. On the Experience-Commitment Account, while it's important that we act on the reasons we possess, it seems like it's not important for us to seek out and possess all the relevant reasons that we know are available. But this seems absurd. The motivation for acting in accordance with Rationality is to do our best in accordance with *Reality* – not to fetishize Rationality for its own sake. Consider how reasons management would fare in the epistemic context. 'Managing' reasons in order to believe or avoid believing something is just rationalization.²⁴⁹ Applied to the present context, the Experience-Commitment Account advises us to make love satisfy the letter of Rationality by violating its spirit through rationalization. This cannot be a rationally justified or motivationally stable approach to love.

In response, the Experience-Commitment Account does not advise lovers to rationalize their love. Instead, it advises lovers to act in accordance with reality by paying attention to their commitments and limited cognitive resources. To see why, we need to understand how properly responding to reality (i.e. keeping the spirit of Rationality) sometimes involves ignoring reasons that we could have possessed. Recall the distinction drew in 2.2. In some cases, we must possess certain reasons. This “must” can be understood either probabilistically or normatively.

²⁴⁹ Thanks to an anonymous commentator for providing this pithy formulation of the objection.

Must₁: The agent must possess some reason R because given the possession conditions for R, it is highly likely that the agent will possess R.

Must₂: The agent must possess some reason R because there are norms/reasons that favor or require that the agent possess R.

As an example of must₁, an agent with normal perceptual faculties would possess reasons to believe that there is a tree in front of her if presented with a tree under normal conditions. As an example of must₂, a student has most reason to know what is in the honor code.²⁵⁰ She must₂ possess reasons not to cheat given her school's honor code even though it may not be true that she must₁ possess such a reason.

Let's apply these concepts to epistemic reasons. When we must₁ possess a reason, it's highly unlikely that we would be able to avoid possessing the reason given our cognitive faculties. Other times, we must₂ possess certain reasons. For example, our evidence may itself support further investigation or we have role-affiliated obligations or duties that provide us with instrumental reasons to seek and possess reasons in order to fulfill said obligations and duties. There may even be standing (though often weak) reasons to seek out evidence for any subject of inquiry because it may be useful to both oneself and others.²⁵¹

What we should deny is that there will *always* be most reason to seek out and possess additional epistemic reasons. This is because investigating and other ways of seeking out and

²⁵⁰ See Hunter (2018) for this example and an excellent discussion of issues concerning what we ought to know.

²⁵¹ For an example of role-affiliated obligations, consider a bus driver who must know her route in order to do her job. As for standing reasons to seek evidence for any subject of inquiry, we may have instrumental reason to seek the truth about any matter of investigation and perhaps moral reason to be a reliable source of information for others who have their own goals.

possessing reasons are themselves activities that are governed by reasons.²⁵² In other words, just as there are many cases in which we must₂ possess certain reasons, there are many other cases in which we mustn't₂ possess certain reasons. For example, there are cases in which even seeking readily available evidence may be practically or epistemically disadvantageous.²⁵³ Other times, we have most reason not to investigate certain matters (e.g. a stranger's medical records). Most germane for our discussion, we have limited cognitive resources – resources that are demanded by our actual commitments and intellectual projects. In these circumstances, we may have most reason to investigate some matters and not others. A general policy of biased evidence gathering or refusal to investigate carefully is irrational, but it *is* rational for us to sometimes refuse to engage in further investigation for the sake of possessing additional reasons. Such investigations carry genuine opportunity costs and narrowing our investigations can spare cognitive resources that would allow us to more clearly understand parts of reality that we care about.²⁵⁴ There is nothing motivationally unstable about refusing to seek further reasons in such cases.

If it's not the case that we must₂ possess epistemic reasons generally, we should expect the same applies equally to love's reasons. Of course, there will be cases in which we may have most reason to keep seeking reasons. For example, the small-town high school senior headed to NYU would probably possess most reason to hold out rather than settle

²⁵² The point comes from Buchak (2014).

²⁵³ Buchak (2014) considers cases of risky evidence where gaining readily available evidence actually decreases risk-sensitive expected utility. Campbell-Moore and Salow (draft) argue that it can be epistemically commendable for risk-avoidant agents to avoid evidence.

²⁵⁴ Another way of putting this is that there is an epistemic division of labor. We're better off together in terms of understanding the world if we each devoted our limited resources to understanding parts of it as opposed to trying to do the labor all by ourselves.

for the bland boy who just started pursuing her.²⁵⁵ However, our reasons often don't determine whether we should continue seeking or perhaps even requires us not to seek reasons to love others.²⁵⁶ That's when we are free to manage our reasons in favor of our beloved. Just as there are opportunity costs associated with overextending our cognitive resources across too many investigations, given our limited emotional and physical capacities, we may only appreciate and experience the qualities of a few people intimately. If

²⁵⁵ One might worry that on my view, since the qualities of a person, once possessed, can require love, then we are required to love whoever we first come to possess reasons to love. My response is this: guilty as charged (at least somewhat). First, reasons for love may involve a fittingness relation between the lover and the beloved. Someone may be beautiful but not attractive to you. Thus, not just any person you meet may provide you with weighty reasons to love them. Second, if romantic love is a complex attitude that comes in degrees, perhaps romantic love is fitting after all (though initially to a lesser degree). Third, there could be second-order reasons to hold out. Finally, the result is not as counterintuitive as it initially seems. Though who we romantically love is subject to rational scrutiny, we end up loving who we do initially through circumstantial interaction. We love who we do by responding to the reasons we initially possess, and we strengthen this love through our reasons management.

²⁵⁶ One might think that in every case, our reasons decisively determine whether we ought to seek or avoid seeking new reasons. This would be a form of second-order uniqueness about rationality – our circumstances always uniquely determine whether we should manage or avoid managing our reasons. First, we should be skeptical of second-order uniqueness. We aren't tempted by it when considering intellectual pursuits in general. We have limited cognitive resources and what reasons we ought to possess often depends on the practical and intellectual projects and roles that we freely adopt. The same applies to love. Second, suppose we grant that second-order uniqueness is true. Recall what Rationality tells us:

Rationality: If an agent is choosing between any two attitudes or actions A and B, it is rational for an agent to choose attitude or action A only if she does not possess more/weightier reason to choose B.

I grant that in some cases we may have decisive second-order reasons to seek additional reasons for love (i.e. not engage in reasons management) or to avoid seeking such reasons (which is consistent with reasons management). However, it may also be true that even if there are such decisive reasons, a lover may fail to possess them. Second-order reasons to seek or avoid seeking first-order reasons for love may be even harder to possess than said first-order reasons. Thus, even if second-level uniqueness is true, in many cases, lovers won't possess more reasons to refrain from reasons management than to engage in reasons management. Thus, they won't be irrational if they did engage in reasons management. In such cases, lovers are "free" to engage in reasons management insofar as it won't be irrational for them to do so. Finally, suppose that a lover did possess decisive second-order reasons to seek additional reasons for love and to not engage in reasons management. I accept that the lover should follow her second-order possessed reasons. That said, most cases won't be as obvious and there are degrees of irrationality concerning trading up. If mild higher-order irrationality is the price to pay in order to resist trading up, the price is right. Thanks to Sullivan for helping me put the point succinctly in terms of second-order uniqueness. Also see 2.2 for more discussion.

so, it may only be possible to love one (or perhaps a few) people at a time.²⁵⁷ To attempt to do otherwise may leave us unable to love well and to be unhappy. More information is also not always better. Recalling Amal and George, dating apps can be helpful, but they can also lead to decision fatigue, unhappiness, and an increased inability to see people as they are rather than their carefully crafted self-representations. Our actual commitments (e.g. raising a child, being married or in a meaningful relationship, etc.) may also generate non-quality-based reasons to ensure that our love remains constant by avoiding reasons to love others.

Just as Rationality does not require us to seek out and possess all available epistemic reasons, it does not require us to seek out and possess all the available reasons for love. There is considerable flexibility as to how we should manage our reasons both as good knowers and as good lovers. The Experience-Commitment Account keeps both the letter and spirit of Rationality.

4.3.3 Comparing the Experience-Commitment Account to Love's Vision

In order to highlight additional advantages of the Experience-Commitment Account, let's contrast it with the most thorough attempt at solving the Trade Up Problem developed by Jollimore in *Love's Vision*. Jollimore conceives of love as a kind of vision that simultaneously responds to "independent, preexisting values" but also involves a kind of bestowal which involves a "close, generous, and imaginative attention that allows valuable features ... fully to reveal themselves (2011, 71-72)." Jollimore takes this idea of appreciating, not just recognizing, a lover's qualities as an instance of the distinction between

²⁵⁷ For more on this point, see 3.4.

appreciating and recognizing value. In order to appreciate a value (a reason), an agent must endorse and engage with it:²⁵⁸

That is, an agent endorses a given bearer of value by judging it to be valuable and by taking its value to be directly relevant to her own decision making. (By going this far, she has already, in essence, acknowledged that it gives her certain reasons for action.) She engages with a bearer of value by having the appropriate affective response to it and by being spontaneously motivated – that is, motivated by her perception of its value – to act toward it in appropriate ways.

The passage above suggests that Jollimore rejects **Basic Possession** much like I do. Though Jollimore is a partner in crime, there are also important differences between our accounts.

Recall that Jollimore appeals to enticing reasons when he writes “in particular, it is necessary to understand the way in which values generate reasons that render certain objects or options *eligible* for choice without making it *mandatory* that agents select those particular options (2011, 71-72).” But the Experience-Commitment Account accommodates the idea that some reasons needn’t play a role in determining what you ought to do by appealing to facts about possession rather than to enticing reasons. Second, we’ve seen that the Enticing Reasons Account has a much harder time dealing with cases of irrational love. Jollimore faces the same problems.

Suppose that Jollimore forgoes enticing reasons and appeals to his distinction between appreciating and recognizing reasons in order to explain Optional Reasons Support. Even interpreting Jollimore as rejecting **Basic Possession** rather than appealing to enticing

²⁵⁸ Jollimore (2011, 107).

reasons, I disagree with how he tries to replace the principle in the context of love. In particular, Jollimore and I substantively disagree about the role commitment plays in love.

First, a technical point. Jollimore's discussion of appreciating (i.e. fully possessing) bearers of values as reasons is less systematic than my approach. While many reasons will involve facts about the qualities of value bearers, I am more ecumenical. Jollimore provides a proposal for the possession conditions of a certain class of reasons (e.g. value-based reasons). The Experience-Commitment Account starts from a general principle about reasons possession borrowed from Lord and applies it to the context of love. This additional systematicity allows us to consider love as connected to other issues that can be addressed by appealing to reasons possession.²⁵⁹

More importantly, Jollimore and I substantively disagree about the commitment that is characteristic of love. On Jollimore's view, love involves a commitment to viewing the beloved with a "loving perspective". Jollimore considers the example of the faithful wife:²⁶⁰

She need not deny that the stranger is genuinely attractive, perhaps even as attractive as her husband; it is simply that for her, the question of how attractive he is is beside the point. She does not occupy the comparative perspective demanded by pure self-interest, the sort of perspective from which her husband's attractions, and the benefits of being faithful to him, would have to be evaluated neutrally against the attractions and possible benefits of other potential partners. Rather, she occupies a loving perspective, from which the focus of her attention will be on her husband and their relationship.

There are two ways of understanding this 'loving perspective.' On my reading, the last sentence is crucial. The committed lover seeks to pay attention to her lover and her

²⁵⁹ I explore some of these issues (e.g. Chang's will-based reasons, the justifying/requiring strength distinction) elsewhere.

²⁶⁰ Jollimore (2011, 105)

relationship. This may involve avoiding certain kinds of interactions with potentially attractive romantic partners (e.g. avoiding intimate interactions etc.) and seeking certain kinds of interactions with one's beloved (e.g. seeking intimate interactions etc.) in order to continue experiencing his qualities. Jollimore, on the other hand, takes the middle sentence to be crucial. The loving perspective, he latter writes, involves silencing the qualities of others besides your beloved so that they become irrelevant to one's deliberation. They are not to be considered as just one other quality to be weighed against the qualities of your beloved. The qualities of a person are possessed as reasons for love only if they are endorsed as such.²⁶¹ I disagree with Jollimore's interpretation of the 'loving perspective' precisely because it involves distorting reality in a way that can lead to undue shame and a lack of confidence in one's love life.

On my interpretation of love's commitment, we commit to loving our beloveds by focusing our attention on his qualities while averting our attention from the qualities of others. However, when we are placed in the presence of wonderful people, we shouldn't be ashamed when we recognize those qualities as favoring loving them. Nor should we seek to silence them as reasons or seek to make them irrelevant in our deliberation. Jollimore, on the other hand, insists that appreciating (fully possessing) a reason requires some form of

²⁶¹ Jollimore (2011, 107) writes:

Similarly, an agent might find herself being engaged by a value *she does not fully endorse*. Consider an agent who finds herself attracted, unwillingly, to a man other than her husband. The attractive stranger is, of course, a bearer of genuine value—he really is, let us suppose, handsome, witty, and sympathetic—and a romantic relationship with him would also bear certain sorts of real value; but these are values the agent thinks she ought to regard, and indeed wishes to regard, *as irrelevant to her situation*. *She would like the stranger's attractions to be silenced for her*. If she possessed voluntary control over her affective and motivational responses, this is how she would choose to feel, or rather choose not to feel. But try as she might, she may well find herself unable to end the conflict between the unruly elements of her responsive nature through force of will alone (my emphasis).

explicit or implicit endorsement. This is misguided. If we experience the qualities of another person and know how it is relevant in our deliberation, we possess the reason. No implicit or explicit endorsement is required.²⁶² If we recognize that someone is attractive, we know how that feature is relevant in our deliberations. We can't willfully shut off the psychological mechanisms involved in possessing and deliberating with reasons.

More importantly, possessing the qualities of others as reasons for love as we experience them promotes a healthier and more confident love life. First, suppose you've been dating a decent guy for two months but it's going nowhere. Suppose that someone else comes along who is genuinely great. The proper response, absent an extensive shared history and relationship, is not shame for factoring the qualities of this other person in your deliberation rather than adopting Jollimore's loving perspective. The proper response might be to respectfully break up and trade up!

On the other hand, suppose you have made significant commitments to your beloved. Suppose you're in a fulfilling marriage, have children together, and share a rich history. Even if you come upon someone great, the proper response is not to discount their qualities as irrelevant. Instead, be confident that you have overwhelming reason to love your beloved. Your romantic partner would not want you to deceive yourself in order to justify loving him. Tricking yourself in this way makes you less able to possess and respond to reasons for love generally – including reasons to love your beloved.

²⁶² This difference affords my account an additional advantage. An anonymous commentator objected that a depressed lover would fail to possess reasons for love because she would fail to appreciate the qualities of her beloved. On my understanding of reasons possession, we may still possess the qualities of a beloved as reasons for love even if we can't currently endorse or appreciate them. Since Jollimore seems to think that a lover possesses the qualities of her beloved as reasons for love only if she endorses them, his view has a harder time with the depressed lover who is unable to make such endorsements. That said, both Jollimore and I can both grant that the depressed lover may still possess non-quality-based reasons for love if they apply.

Summarizing the disagreement, we shouldn't drop the neutral perspective that Jollimore thinks is incompatible with the 'loving perspective'. Instead, the proper response is to either trade up or to be confident that even with this neutral perspective, we have most reason to love and to remain in love with our beloveds. It's not problematic for us to appreciate that someone else is great. What *is* problematic is (i) trying to suppress our reasons possession mechanisms to make such qualities irrelevant or (ii) continuing to engage in intimate interactions with others at the cost of being with our beloveds. Doing so demonstrates a lack of commitment to our beloveds that is subject to our beloveds' criticisms and robs us of the capacity and time to properly love them.

4.3.4 Some Additional Advantages

The Experience-Commitment Account has some additional advantages over accounts of love's reasons and rationality in the current literature. First, it can explain the intuitive appeal of the Relationship Account. *Pace* Naar, the existence of a relationship is not a necessary condition on possessing reasons for love. Systematic theorizing about reasons possession does not support positing this necessary condition. Nevertheless, there is a role for relationships in accounting for the rationality of love. They often provide the context for intimate and continued experience of a beloved's qualities, and experience *is* a necessary condition for possessing a beloved's qualities as reasons for love. While initially, love (perhaps at first sight) could be rational without a relationship, in the long-term, being in a committed relationship is the best way to manage one's reasons in favor of one's beloved in order to resist trading up. This also explains how the rationality of one's love can solidify with the presence of a healthy relationship.

Second, the Experience-Commitment Account can also help explain why our beloveds become uniquely fitting objects of our love. While there is no antecedently uniquely fitting person for us to love *pace* Plato's *Symposium*, we make it the case that we possess reason to love our beloved.²⁶³ Lovers transform each other through reasons management into uniquely fitting pairs of lovers.

Finally, the Experience-Commitment Account makes interesting predictions about puzzling phenomena such as love at first sight. Perhaps love at first sight can be rational after all. First, if a lover has never intimately experienced another person physically, intellectually, etc. or have only had experiences with terrible people, then when she does have such experiences for the first time with someone great or just decent, this might be enough for her to possess most reason to love that person. Second, love at first sight could occur when we encounter situations where we are abnormally exposed to one another – e.g. in contexts where our lives are endangered or when we're seeking romantic connections in ways that clearly reveal our qualities. Insofar as love at first sight can be rational, my account explains how this is so: in these cases, we are far more likely to possess reasons for love.

4.4 Additional Objections and Responses

Let's address some remaining objections to the Experience-Commitment Account.

Objection 1: It's highly unlikely that any instance of love is initially rational on your account. It's implausible to think that when we first love someone, there's no other person

²⁶³ See the *Symposium* in Plato (1997). In particular, see Aristophanes' speech from 189e-193b. The passage does suggest a relatively unexplored thesis: the fittingness-based reasons for love not only involve the beloved's qualities but the "fit" between the lover and the beloved's qualities. I mentioned this in section 4.1.1 but won't develop it further here.

that we possess more reason to love. What's even more troubling is that given your claims about reasons management, we can bootstrap our way into affirming our present love, thereby doubling down on our previous mistakes.

Response: Guilty as charged. Perhaps love is seldom *initially* rational in the sense that we love who we have most reason to love. I just claim that most cases of love are rational. This is because *we've made it that way*. We should accept that love is something we may bootstrap our way into. Bootstrapping is clearly unacceptable if we're not responding to genuine reasons, but in the case of love, we are responding to such reasons (e.g. the loveable qualities our beloveds). Second, the bootstrapping charge is most damning when we're bootstrapping ourselves into something morally odious. But note that we're fine with bootstrapping in many areas of life. Think about the personal projects and careers that we've chosen or the children we've had when we're too young. While there are cases where we make huge mistakes that warrant regret, most of us make mistakes all the time that we are fine with affirming after the fact. In other words, we already accept bootstrapping. Love should be no different.²⁶⁴ Third, bootstrapping has limits. As noted earlier, the Experience-Commitment Account does predict that we are rationally required to trade up in a number of cases as it should.

Objection 2: Consider cases in which your beloved is decent, but someone slightly better comes along such that you cannot fail to possess their qualities as reasons for love. Or consider cases where your beloved loses some of his qualities or you were mistaken about his qualities. On any quality view, including the Experience-Commitment Account, wouldn't

²⁶⁴ For further discussion, see Dorsey (2016, 199-200) who also accepts bootstrapping as a potential upshot for his view.

it be possible that (i) a beloved would no longer merit love or (ii) the lover would be required to trade up?²⁶⁵

Response: Recall that I reject the Strict Quality View. The qualities of a beloved are not the only reasons for love. A shared history, relationship, and children may provide non-quality-based reasons for love that may decisively favor loving your beloved even if you meet someone with slightly better qualities. These non-quality-based reasons may also favor seeking new reasons to love your beloved even if they have lost or you were mistaken about their qualities. Finally, in the highly unlikely scenario in which a person has lost *all* of their loveable qualities and has *no* shared history or relationship with *anyone*, they may still be the proper subject of partiality, good will, and some forms of love even if they aren't the proper subject of *romantic* love.

That said, the most pressing cases are the ones in which there aren't weighty non-quality-based reasons to love your beloved and yet you must possess reasons to love someone who is slightly better given circumstances beyond your control. In some of these cases, we probably should trade up. At least it's far from clear. Some may balk at this suggestion. Fortunately, the Experience-Commitment Account, unlike the Relationship Account, can explain why trading up may not be required after all.

The explanation relies on two assumptions regarding reasons possession. First, reasons possession comes in degrees. Second, the weight of a reason from your deliberative standpoint is proportionate to the degree to which it is possessed. Given both assumptions, if a lover has managed her reasons, (i.e. focusing her time and attention on her beloved), she

²⁶⁵ Setiya (2014, 257) raises this concern.

will likely possess most reason to love her beloved over someone with slightly better qualities even bracketing non-quality-based reasons.

Motivating the first assumption, possessing reasons involves the competence to use them as genuine reasons.²⁶⁶ Since competence comes in degrees, so presumably does reasons possession. For example, after spending significant time with your beloved and effort in understanding his personality, you competently note that his brief display of aggression towards a colleague actually displays courage against a department bully. Others incompetently mistake this as pettiness. You fully possess your beloved's aggression in this case as a reason to love him because you know how that display of aggression actually displays courage. Others may possess this aggression as a reason to a minimal degree or perhaps not at all because they don't understand how the aggression displays courage and favors loving your beloved.

Motivating the second assumption, the weight of a reason from the deliberative standpoint is proportionate to the degree it is possessed because an agent should weigh reasons in accordance with her competence in deliberating with them.²⁶⁷ For example, suppose you encounter a seemingly saint-like coworker who spends time making others feel comfortable and complimenting them in various ways. While you may have some

²⁶⁶ For various versions of this claim, see Sylvan (draft), Kauppinen (forthcoming), Lord (2018), and Sosa (2016).

²⁶⁷ See Kiesewetter (2016) who defends the thesis that an agent A has decisive reason to ϕ only if she also has sufficient reason to believe that she has decisive reason to ϕ . Applied to the present context, when an agent lacks competence with a set of reasons, she fails to know how the set actually favors action. If so, then she may lack sufficient reason to assign the set a certain weight and she ought not to deliberate with the assumption that the set has that weight. She should assign weights to sets of reasons in accordance with the weight that she is justified in assigning them – in accordance with her competence.

competence with these perceived qualities as reasons to love your coworker, this competence may actually be limited. Because you haven't spent enough time with your coworker, you don't realize that he is actually a brownnosing opportunist. To love him for his seemingly saint-like behavior would manifest an incompetent assignment of weight to these qualities in your deliberation. Given the possibility for error and the time and effort it takes to develop such competence, you should be cautious in treating his qualities as weighty reasons to love him. Furthermore, the time and effort to develop such competence poses real opportunity costs that count against investigating your coworker further.

If there aren't weighty non-quality-based reasons for love and you've competently deliberated to the conclusion that someone else is better than your current beloved, you should trade up. However, just because someone slightly better comes along and you must₁ possess their qualities as reasons to love them given circumstances beyond your control, that doesn't automatically entail that you should trade up. You may be mistaken as to whether those qualities actually favor love and it's not always worth it to investigate further. Thus, you may still possess most reason to love your beloved because you don't fully possess the qualities of the stranger as reasons to love him. Not only should the weight of those reasons in your deliberation be reduced given your lack of competence, you may also have reasons against engaging in further investigation that would lead you to readjust their weight.

Thus, the Experience-Commitment Account can explain why you aren't required to trade up even in cases in which there aren't weighty non-quality-based reasons to love your beloved and yet you must₁ possess reasons to love someone else who is slightly better given circumstances beyond your control.

Objection 3: Doesn't your account endorse Mike Pence's policy of avoiding private dinners with women who aren't his wife?²⁶⁸

Response: The main problem with Mike Pence's policy is that given important work is done over meals, refusing to eat with other women means that he is excluding them from career-advancing opportunities. Suppose that this wasn't the case. Pence is being sanctimonious when refusing to eat with other women, but the general policy isn't a terrible idea. We do avoid putting ourselves in intimate settings with others who aren't our beloved and we expect that our beloveds do the same. That said, we should still meet up with people and encourage our partners to do the same. Importantly, refraining from intimately experiencing others is just one way of managing our reasons. The Experience-Commitment Account provides additional practical advice. The balance of your reasons matters. Go out to dinner with whoever you want. Just be sure that at the end of the day, you continue spending quality time with your beloved.

Objection 4: If someone has better qualities than your beloved, don't stop loving your beloved. Simply love that other person too. Ethical polyamory is a live option. If Rationality precludes this, then we have all the more reason to reject it in the context of love.

Response: It would be odd if a conceptual claim about the connection between reasons and rationality entails that ethical polyamory is false. It doesn't. The Experience-Commitment Account does not rule out that you may possess most reason to love more than one person. First, perhaps reasons can't be weighed precisely so that you can only possess most reason to love one person. Perhaps you can possess equally weighty reasons to

²⁶⁸ The objection comes from Sarah Stroud and was echoed by Chris Howard.

love multiple people or it's unclear what your reasons support, thereby making it rational for you to choose one, none, or many lovers. Second, my discussion of reasons management is consistent with ethical polyamory. If my examples suggested otherwise, it was only to simplify the prose. Nevertheless, even ethical polyamorists will agree that we can't manage our reasons to love an infinite number of romantic partners. There are limits. Case in point, monogamous relationships are the norm not because of some conceptual requirement on reasons but the result of debatable social norms and contingent biological facts about our physical and mental resources. Lastly, even if my view can be taken as the basis for an objection to ethical polyamory, it would require additional premises that we probably needn't and shouldn't accept.

Objection 5: Your discussion of experience and what it takes to possess a reason seems to suggest that we can't love people at a distance or people we haven't met. But aren't there cases of unrequited love or love at significant spatial and even temporal distance?

Response: While I make the point that many of a person's qualities are possessed only through experience, what this kind of experience amounts to will depend on the qualities that we are considering. If someone is spatially and temporally separated from us, we can't experience them physically. But we could possess reasons to love someone in virtue of our interactions with their literary estate. Though my remarks on Super Tinder could be mistaken to suggest that love at a distance is not rationally possible, strictly speaking, my view is compatible with the idea that we can rationally love someone at significant spatial-temporal distance. It's just that such a lover would have to be either surrounded by fairly terrible people or isolated from good people in order for such love to even have a chance of being rational. Finally, cases of love at a distance are not paradigmatic instances of rational love, and thus, do not pose a serious problem for the Experience-Commitment Account.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter started with the Trading Up Problem: if we know of people with better qualities than our beloveds, how can it be rational for us to continue loving our beloveds? I proposed an answer in defense of the Quality View – the Experience-Commitment Account – that has fewer controversial theoretical commitments, makes sense of how we form and maintain romantic relationships, and does not impugn us with irrationality. The account does allow room for the possibility that trading up is required, especially in cases of abusive love. This is crucial. The existing literature on love has been relatively silent on such cases and we want an account that provides supporters with rational resources to convince victims to stop loving their abusers. Yet, it also gets the right result that we are usually not required to trade up. We usually do possess more reasons to love our beloveds than to love others. This is partly because there are relationship-based and other non-quality-based reasons for love, but there is a more profound explanation. My explanation requires us to think critically about what it takes to possess reasons for love and how we manage our reasons in favor of our beloved. Though the Experience-Commitment Account is complex, its complexity resides in the right place. It does not reside in rejecting a plausible view about love's reasons (i.e. the Quality View) nor does it involve exempting love from Rationality by appealing to an alternative theory of reasons' weight. Its complexity resides in what is genuinely complex: how we love.

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