Can Reasons Fundamentalism Answer the Normative Question?

JAMIE DREIER

There is a reasonably well-known objection to normative realism, which I am going to call the Normative Question Objection, after Korsgaard (1996).¹ Derek Parfit has a reply to this objection.² The reply is characteristic of a program that (Scanlon 2014) calls “Reasons Fundamentalism”, a position shared by Parfit and Scanlon and several others, comprising a non-naturalist realism about fundamental normative properties, along with the claim that the property of being a reason is the fundamental normative property.

I first look at some passages in which the Normative Question Objection is presented, along with Parfit’s replies. These are the data. Then I will give some interpretation. But I won’t make you wait. Here’s the gist of my interpretation. The objection is a serious one, but for some reason it has not been formulated well. The flaws in the formulation allow Parfit a surprisingly easy reply. (He himself seems to be surprised.) So I will diagnose the problems with the formulation, then untangle a couple of knots, and finally suggest a better way of formulating the objection.³

¹ Thanks to Gunnar Björnsson for organizing the workshop on which the chapters in this volume are based, and to the participants in that workshop for pointing out my worst mistakes.
² Thanks also to Simon Blackburn and Geoff Sayre-McCord for organizing a roundtable discussion in Chapel Hill in December 2011, at which I first presented the main ideas of this chapter. It was there that I realized, with some alarm, how closely my disagreement with Parfit matched Korsgaard’s.
³ I will cite Parfit’s book with bracketed page numbers, in the body of the text.
⁴ This chapter gives little development of the objection and the problems it generates for Reasons Fundamentalism. For further development, see Dreier (2014).
9.1. Formulations of the Argument and Parfit’s Replies

Patrick Nowell-Smith writes:

Moral philosophy is a practical science; its aim is to answer questions of the form ‘What shall I do?’ But he then warns that ‘no general answer can be given to this type of question.’ [415]

Parfit replies:

But in asking ‘What shall I do?’, we are not trying to predict our acts. We are trying to make a decision. If moral philosophy had the aim of answering such questions, it could not possibly succeed. Moral philosophy cannot make our decisions. [415]

This reply seems to be a misunderstanding; Nowell-Smith was not suggesting that moral philosophy offers a prediction of our acts, nor was he suggesting that moral philosophy acts for us. He was suggesting that moral philosophy answers for us some questions about what to do. These are practical questions, so Nowell-Smith reasonably concludes that moral philosophy is a ‘practical science.’ But Parfit does understand Nowell-Smith’s point. He knows the point is that moral reasoning is practical, so its aim is to reach a decision.

Though moral discourse is practical, that does not imply that its fundamental question is about what we shall do, rather than what we should or ought to do. We may have already decided that we shall do, or shall try to do, whatever we conclude that we should or ought to do. In answering moral questions, we would then be answering Nowell-Smith’s question, by deciding what to do. [416]

In the context of a question about what a person “shall do,” the word ‘shall’ is ambiguous. Sometimes ‘shall do’ means ‘is going to do,’ making the overall thought a prediction, and sometimes it means ‘should do,’ making the overall thought normative. In the first person (whether plural or singular), “I shall φ” can also express determination or intention. Here Parfit apparently thinks

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4 The quotation is from Nowell-Smith (1954), 277–278.
5 Some prescriptive grammarians insist that ‘shall’ in the first person is predictive, reserving ‘will’ for the expression of determination, and reversing the prescription for the second and third persons.
that philosophy cannot answer the practical question Nowell-Smith has in mind, although it is not altogether clear why.

Parfit next discusses what he calls “the third main argument for non-cognitivism.” Here is the first version, due to Nowell-Smith.

Learning about ‘values’ or ‘duties’ might well be as exciting as learning about spiral nebulae or waterspouts. But what if I am not interested? Why should I do anything about these newly-revealed objects? Some things, I have now learnt, are right and others wrong; but why should I do what is right, and eschew what is wrong? (Nowell-Smith 1954, 41)

Parfit says:

There is an obvious reply. As well as asking which act would be right, we can ask what we ought to do. And when we claim that we ought to do something, we may mean that this act has the property of being what we ought to do. According to Nowell-Smith’s objection, if this is what we mean, we could sensibly deny that we ought to do what we ought to do. That is not so. [417]

Similarly, Bernard Williams says that if learning that one ought to do a certain thing “just tells one a fact about the universe, one needs some further explanation of why [we] should take any notice of that particular fact” (Williams 1981, 122). Parfit replies:

Suppose that we knew another such fact, since we also knew why we should take notice of this fact about what we ought to do. On Williams’s objection, we could still sensibly ask why we should take notice of this fact. That is not so. [417]

And Hare asks, “if it is merely a fact that some possible act has ‘the moral property of wrongness’, why should we be troubled by that?” (Hare 1981, 217). Parfit:

But suppose we knew why we should be troubled by this act’s wrongness. On Hare’s objection, this would merely be another fact. Though we knew why we should be troubled, we could still sensibly ask why we should be troubled. That is not so. [418]

Finally, there are some passages from Korsgaard. Here is the first:

If it is just a fact that a certain action would be good, a fact that you might or might not apply to deliberation, then it seems to be an open question whether you should apply it. (Korsgaard 2008, 217)
Parfit:

But suppose that you should apply this fact to your deliberation. On Korsgaard’s objection, since this would just be another fact, it would still be an open question whether you should apply this fact to your deliberation. That is not so. If you should do something, it is not an open question whether you should do it. [418]

Nowell-Smith, Williams, Hare, and Korsgaard are pressing roughly the same point. They are complaining that according to a metaethical realist view, drawing correct moral conclusions is nothing beyond learning some new facts, and learning new facts leaves some normative question unanswered. Parfit, needless to say, thinks this is not so.

Here is how Korsgaard puts it in “The Normative Question”:

you are being asked to face death rather than do a certain action. You ask the normative question: you want to know whether this terrible claim on you is justified. Is it really true that this is what you must do? The realist’s answer to this question is simply ‘Yes’. That is, all he can say is that it is true that this is what you ought to do. (Korsgaard 1996, 38)

Some people have thought that Korsgaard’s point is a very weak one. They think she is pointing out that it is really lame for a realist, when asked such a serious practical question, to give such a bland reply—so unconvincing! That would be a weak point. One might also interpret Korsgaard as claiming that it’s a shortcoming of truths that they are so bland and unexplanatory. And again, this would be a weak point (but below I will tersely suggest that it is an important part of the really serious problem). But I think that is not her main point here.

According to realists, says Korsgaard,

rationality is a matter of conforming the will to standards of reason that exist independently of the will, as a set of truths about what there is reason to do. . . . The difficulty with this account . . . exists right on its surface, for the account invites the question why it is rational to conform to those reasons, and seems to leave us in need of a reason to be rational. (Korsgaard 1997, 240)

That is, according to this interpretation, the conclusion she means to draw is relatively weak; the argument for it is strong. My alternative interpretation is that she is looking to draw a stronger conclusion.
I think it’s interesting that Korsgaard seems to think there is some infinite regress here; I have never quite seen what it’s supposed to be. In particular, here she says that on a heteronomous account, we can always ask of the reasons, what reason we have to follow them. Parfit replies,

> Like the other writers quoted above, Korsgaard presents this objection in a surprisingly self-undermining way. According to what Korsgaard calls normative realism, when we know the relevant facts, we are rational if we want, and do, what we have decisive reasons to want, and do. So Korsgaard seems here to suggest that, if realism were true, we might need a reason to want, and do, what we knew that we had decisive reasons to want, and do. That is clearly false. [420]

9.2. Interpretation and Diagnosis

Now I think some people, like me, will think that it is fairly obvious that Parfit has misunderstood the objection, although it is perhaps understandable that he should have misunderstood it. The following first pass is mainly for those people. Some people may, to the contrary, think that Parfit has quite cogently shown that the entire objection is confused. They will have to wait a little while for enlightenment.

Here is the first mistake that Hare, Nowell-Smith, Williams, and Korsgaard made. They should not have put the objection in terms of truth (in Hare’s case, fact, but I think it amounts to the same mistake). Because of schema T, or the disquotation property, or the transparency of truth, the characterization of Realism as the view according to which normative judgment is judgment of truths and facts is too syntactic (because it counts any view according to which normative judgments are expressed by declarative sentences as Realist). The Objectors end up trying to contrast some declarative sentences they endorse as expressing truths or facts with others, but the contrast won’t work because, to put it a bit too simplistically, truth-aptness and fact-hood are too easy to come by.7

The second mistake is to try to capture the Normative Question—the question that is supposed to remain after the Realist has said everything available—by means of the words ‘should’ or ‘ought.’ This mistake is the bigger one. It is what allows Parfit to say that the arguments are all self-undermining.

7 Hare and Korsgaard both think that, in some sense, moral sentences are imperative in their deep structure, and so perhaps are not fully apt for truth; but both are quite happy to state moral judgments with declarative sentences, e.g., by predicating ‘wrong’ of an action. See Dreier (2004) for a fuller account of the difficulty with explicating the distinction between realism and its alternatives in the light of deflationary understandings of central semantic and metaphysical concepts.
Let’s deal with the first mistake first. Korsgaard:

We must go carefully here. In calling this into question, I do not mean to deny that there is a sense in which all of our concepts—that is, all of the concepts we have any business using—can be used in propositions which do in fact describe reality, in the sense that they are capable of being true or false. Rather, I mean to call into question the idea that this is what all of our concepts are for—that their cognitive job, so to speak, is to describe reality. So long as we retain that idea, it will continue to appear that moral realism is the only possible alternative to relativism, skepticism, subjectivism, and all of the various ways that ethics might seem hopeless. And so long as moral realism appears to be the only alternative to these skeptical options, the need to show that moral truth is as solid, as real, as objective, as scientific truth—and also that it is objective *in the same way* as scientific truth—will seem pressing. This was our situation in the early and middle years of the twentieth century. (Korsgaard 2008, 309)

Korsgaard *et al.* should stick with this sense (of ‘describe reality’), and drop the truth-centered version of the objection.

How shall we fix the second mistake? Plainly, *if* there is a Normative Question that remains after all the normative facts are in, it cannot be the question of whether one *should* act in a certain way, or *ought* to act in a certain way, since one of the normative facts might simply be the fact that one should act in that way. So it must be some other question, if there is a remainder question.

I think there is. Nowell-Smith tried to capture it by calling it the question of what I *shall* do. “Moral philosophy is a practical science; its aim is to answer questions of the form ‘What shall I do?’” But he then warns that “no general answer can be given to this type of question.” We have noted that ‘what shall I do?’ is ambiguous; one question is the one you answer when and only when you have decided what to do. It is answered with an intention, perhaps, or a plan. The other, according to Parfit, is a properly normative question.

Though moral discourse is practical, that does not imply that its fundamental question is about what we *shall* do, rather than what we *should* or *ought* to do. We may have already decided that we shall do, or shall try to do, whatever we conclude that we should or ought to do. In answering moral questions, we would then be answering Nowell-Smith’s question, by deciding what to do.
There are two odd things about this paragraph. One is that Parfit does not notice that ‘shall’ and ‘should’ are so closely related. (Is it just an odd coincidence that to name the special non-natural property, we decided to use the subjunctive of ‘shall’?) The other is that Parfit seems to think that the way moral judgment is connected to the practical is in the fact that we may have already decided that we shall do whatever we conclude that we should do. This is no connection at all. We may have already decided that we shall do whatever the boss says. We may have already decided that we shall do whatever we conclude will take the shortest amount of time. For pretty nearly any property, we may have already decided that we shall do whatever has that property. So no particular practical role for moral reasoning is secured by Parfit’s observation.  

I hope the gist of the important question, the practical one, the normative one, is fairly clear. If not, here are two ways to get at it. The first is from Gibbard in *Thinking How to Live*:

When questions of what to do are hard, we can’t just claim to know perfectly well what to do and leave it at that. But to resolve these questions, can some naturalistic account or treatment help? Can some form of non-naturalism help? These positions just change the subject, we can see. We ask what to do, they hand us analyses of a different question. (Gibbard 2003, 15)

Here is Parfit’s reply to Gibbard:

Gibbard’s claim is surprising. Suppose that, in Burning Hotel, you decide that you ought to jump into the canal, because that is your only way to save your life. On Gibbard’s view, if it was merely a normative fact that you ought to jump, and your belief that you ought to jump was not a decision to jump, your belief could not help you to decide whether to jump. That is clearly false. [414–415]

Hasn’t Parfit missed the point? Gibbard is saying that if the fact that you ought to jump were the fact that jumping has a certain non-natural property, then it would not help you to decide whether to jump. Gibbard, of course, agrees that your belief that you ought to jump could help you decide whether to jump (because according to Gibbard, what we call a belief that you ought to jump is

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8 Gunnar Björnsson pointed out to me that it is not entirely clear Parfit means to be suggesting an account of the connection between deciding what to do and deciding what we ought to do, in this passage. It may be that he means all along to endorse the Rationality connection I go on to discuss below.
tantamount to a decision to jump). He concludes, by modus tollens, that the fact that you ought to jump cannot be understood as the fact that jumping has a certain non-natural property.

The second way to get at the question is via this nice metaphor, from Korsgaard:

> If to have knowledge is to have a map of the world, then to be able to act well is to be able to decide where to go and to follow the map in going there. The ability to act is something like the ability to *use* the map, and that ability cannot be given by *another map*. (Nor can it be given by having little normative flags added to the map of nature which mark out certain spots or certain routes as good. You still have to know how to use the map before the little normative flags can be of any use to you.) (Korsgaard 2008, 315)

I find these useful. They convince me that there is a coherent worry, shared and advanced by Kantians and non-cognitivists against non-naturalist Realists.

For those who don’t accept the premise that Kantians and Non-cognitivists share, I can say this. There must be something to the idea that normative judgment is essentially practical. Even Parfit admits this. Non-cognitivists have one account of what this essential practicality amounts to. Kantians have a different account. We need some account. Non-naturalists appear to have none. That is the problem, in a nutshell.

In the last section I will re-construe the Normative Question Argument in a way that avoids the rhetorical traps its previous exponents have fallen into.

### 9.3. The Kernel

#### 9.3.1. PRELIMINARY UNTANGLING

But first I have to untangle a terminological problem. Some philosophers, like Parfit, use ‘rational’ to mean ‘best supported by reasons.’ But others, like Scanlon, use it for ‘what the agent takes to be best supported by reasons.’ In the first sense, someone who is normatively stunted or oblivious could be called irrational, because he is not able to recognize certain things as reasons. But in this chapter I do not call that ‘irrational’; I reserve that term for a person

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9 I leave aside the interesting question of how naturalist realism fits in here.

10 At least, I think it’s a terminological problem. It may be a substantive dispute over what kinds of thinking or action warrants a distinctive sort of evaluation of a thinking agent. But I will proceed on the assumption that it is a terminological dispute over which of two kinds of evaluation should be expressed by ‘irrational.’
who fails to respond, motivationally, to what she herself regards as reasons. That is what I will mean. I do think this is a terminological difference with Parfit; if it is a disagreement over a substantial normative matter, then it’s one that will have to be engaged on some other occasion. The rest of this subsection expands on the two ways of using ‘irrational,’ and may be skipped by any reader who will not be worried about the terminological problem.

Take some plain fact that might on some occasion be my reason for acting. Say (using an example from Schroeder 2010, 4) it’s the fact that Katie is in trouble, and that this is a reason for me to help Katie. The fact that Katie is in trouble we’ll call ‘K,’ and the further claim (I don’t mind calling it a fact, but let’s just call it a claim) that this is a reason for me to help Katie we’ll call ‘R(K).’

Now suppose that on this occasion, I am utterly unmoved to help Katie. We can distinguish three scenarios.

First, I might simply be unaware that Katie is in trouble. And this could be faultless, on my part, or obtuseness of some kind. Either way, I suppose, I need not be irrational in lacking any motivation to help Katie.

Second, I might be aware that Katie is in trouble, but I might fail to conclude that I have any reason to help Katie. When asked, I say, “That’s true, she is in trouble, but what’s that to me?” Maybe I’ve read too much Ayn Rand or something. Let’s hold off on a verdict for me for a moment.

Third, I might be aware both that K and that R(K), but be completely unmoved. It’s not merely that I find I do have a reason to help Katie but stronger reason not to help her, or that I am moved toward helping her but some further motivation counteracts that one. My judgment, I’m imagining, just leaves me cold. Sure, I say, that’s a reason for me to help Katie—but it doesn’t move me. In this scenario, I believe we can all agree, I would be irrational. It is irrational to fail to be moved by one’s acknowledged reasons. (To peek ahead, this is going to be the critical fact, and I want to use it to press my objection to Fundamentalism.)

So now we have two verdicts: in scenario one I might be faultless, in scenario three I am irrational. What is the verdict about scenario two?

Remember, in scenario two I am aware that K, but I do not conclude that R(K). Here are two possible verdicts.

Scanlon: I am normatively defective. There may be a plausible (and even partly exculpatory) explanation: I was brought up badly, I read too much Rand, I have been taken in by lousy arguments. Still, I bear some fault, a moral one perhaps.

Parfit: I am irrational. For rationality is simply a matter of responding correctly to my reasons.

I want to say that Parfit’s terminology squishes out an interesting category. It seems to me that there is a kind of ‘blindness,’ a kind of moral failing, which
a person can suffer from even when the person is fully, well, rational. One way to put this is to say that I could still be completely intelligible as an agent (though I don’t want to commit to the view that rationality and intelligibility as an agent are one). Stevie bumps into things because of his blindness; were he fully sighted he would avoid the mishap, and he’d be better off fully sighted, but he is not ‘guilty’ of anything. Jacob was raised Randian, and as a result he is blind to the reasonableness of helping those in need, and (unlike Stevie) he might be blameworthy for this failing, but we don’t have any trouble understanding what he’s up to. On the other hand, if someone acknowledges that the fact that K is a reason to help Katie, and remains yet unmoved, then something has gone more deeply wrong with his agency. This I want to call ‘irrationality,’ but Parfit has already used the word for something else.

But since this is my paper, I’ll just take it back. In so doing, once again, I don’t think I am entering into a substantive dispute.

9.3.2. THE NEW NORMATIVE QUESTION

The question that Korsgaard, Hare, Nowell-Smith, and Williams meant to be asking (rhetorically) has to do with rationality. Let’s get a running start at this question by asking first: How does a judgment that one ought to φ (or that one has reason to φ) motivate a person to φ, when it does motivate her? In one of his replies to Nowell-Smith, as I mentioned, Parfit seems to offer an answer to this question:

We may have already decided that we shall do, or shall try to do, whatever we conclude that we should or ought to do.

In some sense, this is an account of how the normative judgment might motivate me. But it does not seem to be a satisfactory one. Compare: we may have already decided that we shall do, or shall try to do, whatever we conclude the law, or mother, or God, commands us to do. We may have already decided that we shall do whatever maximizes expected utility, or whatever conforms to rules that free and equal people could not reasonably reject. But then again, we may not have decided any of those things; we might be trying to decide now. And if we were, it would be natural to describe our deliberations as being about whether we ought to do one or the other of those things. If Parfit’s account were

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11 Not ‘fully rational’ in, say, the sense of Smith (1994); in his sense, I could still be plain vanilla rational, the kind of rational that we all are much of the time, even though I couldn’t be ‘fully rational’ in the sense that I would not completely live up to an ideal that is perhaps not really attainable by human beings; see esp. pp. 151ff.
correct, then it would also seem natural sometimes to think about whether we ought to do whatever we conclude we should or ought to do. But that is not so; this obviously is not natural at all. So Parfit’s account cannot be right. We are left to puzzle over how normative judgment motivates.

This, I think, is why some of Parfit’s targets write as if the question they had in mind is the strange and trivial one of whether or why we ought to do whatever it is that we ought to do. They do not mean to say that this is genuinely a substantive question. They mean to say that on the assumption that realism is true, it turns out to be a genuine question.

However, Parfit could disavow what he said in reply to Nowell-Smith. How, then, could our judgments of what we ought to do motivate us to do things, when they do? Realists do not want to give the kind of answer that non-cognitivists give. But maybe they can say: our judgments of what we ought to do motivate us, when they do, by virtue of our rationality.

This answer need not be mysterian. Think of Korsgaard’s discussion in “Skepticism about Practical Reason” (Korsgaard 1986). The necessity that connects premises to conclusion in our reasoning is not, after all, metaphysical necessity, nor is it merely causal necessity; it is rational necessity. This was the point of Lewis Carroll’s “What the Tortoise Said to Achilles” (Carroll 1895): the Tortoise failed to draw an obvious conclusion of modus ponens reasoning, and challenged Achilles to force him to do so. We say that the connection between the premises, or belief in them, and the conclusion, and belief in it, is a connection of necessity. Achilles even claims that if the Tortoise does not accept the conclusion, logic will grab him by the neck and force him to accept it! But the thing to say about a Tortoise, really, is that he is irrational, not that the scenario in which he fails to draw the obvious conclusion is impossible. Rationality is a faculty of ours, and in its normal operation it produces conjunctive beliefs from beliefs in the conjuncts, and consequent beliefs from beliefs in conditionals and their antecedents, and motivations to φ from beliefs that we ought to φ.

That was the running start, and we’ve hit the starting line. Now I can formulate the hard question for realists: Why is it irrational to fail to be motivated to do what one believes one ought to do? And Korsgaard did put the question in (almost exactly) this way:

[According to realists,] rationality is a matter of conforming the will to standards of reason that exist independently of the will, as a set of truths about what there is reason to do . . . . The difficulty with this account . . . exists right on its surface, for the account invites the question why it is rational to conform to those reasons, and seems to leave us in need of a reason to be rational. (Korsgaard 2008, 52–53)
And here was Parfit’s reply:

Like the other writers quoted above, Korsgaard presents this objection in a surprisingly self-undermining way. According to what Korsgaard calls normative realism, when we know the relevant facts, we are rational if we want, and do, what we have decisive reasons to want, and do. So Korsgaard seems here to suggest that, if realism were true, we might need a reason to want, and do, what we knew that we had decisive reasons to want, and do. That is clearly false. [420]

Let’s leave out the problematic idea that realism “seems to leave us in need of a reason to be rational.” (As I said above, I do think this is a fair way to put it, but it confuses matters.) Leave off at this point: that the realist account invites the question of why it is rational to conform to those reasons.

I take it that Parfit finds this question astonishing. On his view, he says, “when we know the relevant facts, we are rational if we want, and do, what we have decisive reasons to want, and do.” Good! And indeed it is true, that under those circumstances we are rational if we want and do what we [believe we] have decisive reasons to want and do.12 So Parfit’s view has a true implication—what’s the problem?

The problem is that what we want is an explanation. The connection between normative judgment and motivation is a rational connection, we are all agreed now. Connection failure is not impossible, but irrational. And next we would like to see an explanation of why it is irrational. And there is none forthcoming from Realism.

Here it seems appropriate to inject the other complaint of Korsgaard’s: all the realist can do is say that it is true that there is this connection. It’s just a fact. The problem isn’t that what the realist has to say is false, or that nobody else would want to say it; the problem is that it offers nothing in the way of explanation.

You ask the normative question: you want to know whether this terrible claim on you is justified. Is it really true that this is what you must do? The realist’s answer to this question is simply ‘Yes.’ That is, all he can say is that it is true that this is what you ought to do. (Korsgaard 1996, 38)

12 I had to add the bracketed words because of my preferred usage for ‘rational.’
9.4. Sketch of the Next Argument

Actually, this has been more of a setup for another argument than a conclusive argument of its own. It is worth investigating whether there is any good explanation available to a realist of why it is irrational to be unmotivated by one’s own normative judgments. I will finish, but not conclude, by sketching a picture.

First, we might wonder whether any explanation is needed. Could it just be a brute fact that it is irrational to be unmotivated by one’s normative thoughts? In a way it seems like a good candidate: it is very obvious that this is irrational. But that’s not a good reason to think it needs no explanation! (We are not asking for a justification, after all.) So if it has no explanation, I think, we would want an account of why it doesn’t: a second-order explanation.

Second, here is one possibility for explaining why there is no explanation. Rationality might be a disposition. And if it is a disposition, it might be a disposition to (among other things) be motivated to φ when one judges that one ought to φ. Rationality could be constituted by a complex of dispositions, of which one atom is the disposition to be so motivated. In that case, it would be a mistake to demand an explanation of why it is irrational to fail to be motivated by one’s normative judgments. (Compare: why does being thirsty entail that one is motivated by one’s thoughts about water? Well, maybe that’s just what being thirsty is; maybe it is constituted, at least in part, by that disposition.)

But third, that account seems to me to be a bad candidate for the true account of what rationality consists in. Even if rationality is a complex disposition, we should expect that a good theory will tell us what it is about the various elements of the complex that make them fit together into such a juicy, loaded concept as rationality.

To see why, let’s compare accounts of what ought judgments are. According to a Kantian Rationalist, a judgment of what I ought to do is a commitment of my will, perhaps (Korsgaard 1994) an instance of following a general rule I choose for myself. Knowingly failing to follow a rule I continue to endorse is a paradigmatic case of incoherence. Being unmotivated, then, by my ought judgments is in the same family with contradicting myself, or having incoherent probability judgments. The point isn’t that we right-thinking people will decry the failure, but that it is a failure of a particular kind, a failure of the agent’s own states to fit together into a coherent whole.

Now think of Michael Smith’s view of a judgment of what I ought to do. Smith (1994) says it is about what I would want my (actual) self to do were

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13 I develop the fuller argument of which it is a sketch in Dreier (2014).
I fully rational. When I come to a conclusion about what I would want under conditions I myself think of as better than my actual ones, there is a straightforward kind of incoherence in my thinking if I am unmoved.\textsuperscript{14}

What can a Realist say? It is helpful to remind ourselves of what \textit{ought} judgments are, according to Realists. \textit{Ought} judgments are simply beliefs about which things have a certain ineffable non-natural property. Suppose some other beings (not us) had a different disposition: they are disposed to be motivated by their judgments about which actions and states have some other non-natural property (the schmought property, perhaps). Their disposition would, on the present hypothesis, simply be a different disposition from the rationality-constituting disposition. There would be nothing to say about why beliefs about \textit{this} ineffable non-natural property, and not \textit{that} one, rationally require us to be motivated. But now the account does seem unacceptably mysterian. The idea that what we have had in mind all along when we talked about rationality was the disposition to be motivated by which actions we believe to have a certain ineffable property seems pretty strange.

\section*{9.5. Conclusion}

Critics of Parfit, armed with the Normative Question objection, can be parried by simple techniques when they formulate their normative question \textit{in normative terms}. The problem they are getting at is that there are questions about what to do that can’t be answered by the discovery of facts. But talk of truth and facts is too transparent to the first-order domain to articulate the problem critics sought to pose with those notions. The better way to frame the criticism, I have argued, is by reference to rationality, and by emphasizing the need for explanation. The practicality of moral reasoning is in sharper focus when we look at its rational connection to motive and action. And the question to which the realist has no good answer, I have argued, is an explanatory question \textit{about} a practical question.

\section*{References}


\textsuperscript{14} Or so Smith argues. If he is mistaken, as for example he is accused of being by Enoch (2007), then indeed his explanation of how the failure to be motivated by one’s \textit{ought} judgments is irrational will fail.


