

Introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Reasons and Normativity*

People do the various things they do for reasons. To say this is not the same as to say, of the various things that people do, that there are reasons why they do them. If a wealthy person steals money from another person in order to add to her own wealth, then it might be true to say that a *reason why* she behaves in this manner is that she is greedy (that is to say that she behaves as she does *because* she is greedy). But the fact that a particular person is greedy is clearly not itself a *reason to steal*—not even a reason for that person to steal—as it does not in any way justify stealing. Such a person is, no doubt, overlooking or failing to properly take into account important reasons not to steal, and we might even wish to go so far as to say that she is mistaken in thinking she really has any reason at all to steal money; but, insofar as she is purposely taking money away from another person, she will take herself to be acting on a reason (even if she is merely responding to the fairly superficial consideration that she will thereby herself come to possess more money).

People also believe the various things they believe for reasons, and to say this is not the same as to say, of the various things that people believe, that there are reasons why they believe them. A reason why a particular person believes in creationism may be that she was brought up in a creationist community. But the fact that a person is brought up in a creationist community is not, in itself, a reason to believe in creationism—not even a reason for that person to believe in creationism. The fact that generally trustworthy people in her community have told her that creationism is true, on the other hand, may provide this person with reasons to believe in creationism. Still, there are plenty of reasons not to believe in creationism, provided by evidence that it is a false view (at least on the assumption that such evidence is available to the person in question).

Reasons to do and to believe various things are generally termed *normative reasons*. They are distinguished not only from a very general class of *explanatory reasons*—which include explanations of the movements of the clouds, the melting of the polar icecaps, etc.—but also from *motivating reasons*.¹ If there is not, in fact, any money in an otherwise worthless bag stolen from another person, but our thief inappropriately believes that there is, she can be said to merely have a motivating reason for her act of stealing money that does not correspond to any genuine normative reason to steal (this would also be true if there is money in the bag, but the correct ethical view to have about the case is that the fact that she will thereby have more money does not provide even a partial justification for her act). That is to say that she might, in her ignorance, offer up as a reason for committing her act the merely apparent justification that she will thereby ensure she has more money. Roughly speaking, motivating reasons are the reasons we take to apply to our acts, normative reasons are the reasons that really do apply to our acts. When things are going well, these align. Any talk of reasons herein that is left unqualified should be read as being about normative reasons.

In recent years, the study of normative reasons has been a subject at the forefront of a large body of work in ethics and, to a somewhat lesser extent, epistemology.² To a significant degree, the discussion of

¹ Both motivating reasons and normative reasons may be cited in explanations, as reasons why people do and believe the things they do and believe. For an earlier, helpful discussion of how motivating reasons, normative reasons, and explanatory reasons are related, see Alvarez (2009). For an earlier, helpful discussion of reasons for belief, see Ginsborg (2006).

² It is possible to recast traditional discussions in epistemology concerning justification as being about reasons for belief (just as it is possible to recast discussions of *prima facie* duty in Ross 1930 and elsewhere as being about moral reasons), so this comparative claim is really only a claim about the study of reasons approached as such. John Pollock's work (1970, 1987) provides an important early example of an epistemologist concerned to focus on reasons described as such.

reasons that flowered in ethics after the publication of Bernard Williams's "Internal and External Reasons" in 1979 has gone on in isolation from the discussion of reasons in epistemology.³ One overarching aim of the present volume is to assist in remedying this situation by bringing together the latest work being done on reasons and normativity in these two subfields, as well as by including chapters that explicitly address similarities and differences between the way reasons and normativity are (or should be) approached in each area. In addition, since discussion of reasons and normativity are not restricted to ethics and epistemology—one of the fascinating things about the concept of a reason is that it crops up all over the place—it was thought essential to also include chapters that focus on discussions concerning reasons and normativity in other subfields, especially philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, and aesthetics.

Many philosophers now take reasons to be the most fundamental entities in the domain of normativity (or take the concept of a reason to be the key to understanding normativity)—rather than, say, facts about what we ought to do (or the concept of "ought").⁴ That being said, the view that reasons are fundamental to normativity has not gone uncontested (most notably by John Broome 2004, and Chapter 13 in the present volume). It is widely appreciated that this is not a view that can simply be taken for granted. Still, a weaker claim to the effect that there are highly interesting connections worth studying between reasons and normativity seems close to undeniable; it applies as much to Broome's view as it does to the *reasons fundamentalism* of Tim Scanlon (1998) and Derek Parfit (1997, 2011), for instance. This is a key reason for the dual focus on reasons and normativity in this Handbook.

Not all the chapters in the Handbook are concerned with reasons, or even with the weak relation between reasons and normativity just mentioned. Some contributors are concerned to foreground discussions of normativity that have been framed in terms of what we *ought* to do or believe. Some discuss norms of *rationality* that tell individual agents what they are rationally required or permitted to do, intend, or believe, given their other commitments. Discussion of rational requirements is often couched in the language of "ought," although it has been claimed that it is a live question whether such requirements are genuinely normative—that is, whether rationality is itself normative—and for this reason it is sometimes thought best to stick to a neutral language of requirements and permissions when describing the prescriptions of rationality (Kolodny 2007, Broome 2013). This is just to point to one important way in which relations between a wide range of concepts that are at least in the general vicinity of "reason"—"ought," "rationality," "reasonable," "reasoning," "duty," "norm," and "normativity" itself—are themselves the subject of much disagreement.

The Handbook is intended for both students and experts. Students will no doubt find it helpful to approach this volume by routes that are different from those of the experts. I recommend, in particular, that students who are new to the study of reasons start with Part II of the volume, rather than Part I. The chapters in Part I have been placed at the beginning of the volume due to the fact that they address highly general foundational and structural issues. The chapters in Part II, on the other hand, focus on the way reasons feature in action explanations, and on the much-discussed distinctions between internalism and

³ Other texts that were particularly influential around this time include Donald Davidson's "Actions, Reasons, and Causes" (1963), Thomas Nagel's *The Possibility of Altruism* (1970), and Joseph Raz's *Practical Reason and Norms* (1975).

⁴ As a number of contributors point out, to say that reasons are fundamental to normativity must be understood as meaning something like the property of being a reason, or the reason relation, is the fundamental normative property or relation (see, in particular, Chs. 7, 11, and 13). The fact that you are in pain may correctly be said to be a reason to help you, but the ordinary fact that you are in pain is not itself a good candidate for a claim about what is fundamental to normativity.

externalism, and motivational and normative reasons; students new to the study of reasons usually start by learning about these distinctions, and why they are important.

Part I, “The Structure of Normativity,” begins with a contribution from Ralph Wedgwood, who argues for the contentious and interesting claim that what is fundamental to normativity in general is best understood to be a property possessed by a certain class of concepts: normative concepts are those concepts that play an essentially reasoning-guiding role. There will be facts that make true some thoughts that use these concepts, and these may be called normative facts. Wedgwood provides some grounds for thinking that we should not begin with reasons when trying to understand the normative domain, nor search after a basic normative concept. He also considers some important objections to his account of normativity.

Mark Schroeder, who is a well-known advocate of an alternative, *reasons first* approach, where we think of reasons as the building blocks of normativity in both the practical and epistemic domains, explores the question as to what unifies reasons for action and reasons for belief (what makes them all reasons?).⁵ He argues against attempts to model the behavior of all reasons on the behavior of reasons for action, as well as attempts to model the behavior of all reasons on the behavior of reasons for belief, describing what he takes to be some of the most distinctive features of each kind of reason in the process. His arguments make use of John Horty’s (2012) default logic, a logic that Schroeder believes is instructive when it comes to attempting to understand the structure of reasons in general.

In the third chapter in this section, Shyam Nair and John Horty investigate some key issues concerning how best to understand the logic of reasons, in a manner not constrained by adherence to Horty’s own default logic. In particular, they aim to reach a better understanding of how reasons are related to each other than is provided by a commonly assumed “weighing conception of reasons,” according to which the main relation between reasons is that of being outweighed (on this conception, what we ought to do or believe is determined simply by weighing reasons to do or believe the act or proposition in question against reasons not to do or believe the act or proposition in question). It is worth noting here that, insofar as reasons for belief, in particular, most clearly admit of “undercutting”—a kind of defeat that is distinct from “outweighing,” as reasons disappear when there is undercutting, but not when there is outweighing—Nair and Horty are part of the shift in work on reasons in the direction of giving epistemological matters their fair due.⁶

In their chapter on normative language, Aaron Bronfman and J. L. Dowell focus primarily on the meaning of “ought,” which some philosophers take to be the most fundamental normative term. They argue for a particular contextualist account of the semantics of deontic modal expressions derived from an account first proposed by Angelika Kratzer (2012, and earlier work cited by Bronfman and Dowell). This can be viewed as a sophisticated descendant of the old idea that there are many different sense of “ought.” They

⁵ Mark Schroeder’s *Slaves of the Passions* (2007) provides one of the best-known defenses of a Humean account of reasons for action. Such accounts explain the existence of reasons in terms of the desires of actual or idealized agents. Like Michael Smith (1994) before him, Schroeder believes a Humean account of reasons for action is compatible with moral realism. The reasons first approach to understanding normativity should not be confused with reasons fundamentalism; the first, but not the second, is open to there being an informative explanation available of what it is for something to be a reason (reason fundamentalists sometimes express their view by saying that the concept of a reason is primitive). Schroeder (2015) also defends a reasons first approach to reasons for belief (see also Ch. 26).

⁶ Horty and Nair mention, in passing, the historical role that Pollock (1970, 1987) played in highlighting the importance of the undercutting relation with respect to reasons for belief. It should also be said that Jonathan Dancy (1985, 1993, 2006) has been arguing for some time that reasons for action, as well as reasons for belief, admit of undercutting, as well as of a number of other relations that are distinct from weighing (see also Ch. 36).

then consider what accepting this account would mean for our understanding of reasons, concluding that its a virtue of their account that it leaves open what the correct answers to many substantive questions concerning reasons are.

Where the preceding chapter mainly explores the language of “ought,” John Hawthorne and Ofra Magidor’s contribution pays careful attention to the way ordinary speakers talk about reasons. They argue, partly on this basis, that it is useful to distinguish between possessed and unpossessed reasons (we sometimes, although not invariably, refer to possessed reasons through talk of people “having” reasons), and that when an agent possesses a reason to do or believe something, she knows the fact that is her reason. Regarding motivating reasons, they argue that in cases where agents lack knowledge in the relevant respects, they act on no motivating reason at all. Finally, they consider how to adjudicate between two substantive accounts of the nature of reasons: John Broome’s explanation-centered account (2004), and the evidence-centred account proposed by Stephen Kearns and myself (Kearns and Star 2008, 2009).

The chapters in Part II, “Reasons, Motivation, and Action Explanation,” focus on various ways in which normative reasons might be thought to be connected to, or constrained by, the internal motivational states, abilities, or intentional behavior of agents. Hille Paakkunainen discusses the current state of the internalism debate, focusing on two significant components of Williams’s internalism. The first of these is the view that it is a necessary condition of any consideration being a reason to do a particular act that the relevant agent can do the act in question *because* of the consideration in question (the “explanatory constraint”); the second is the view that it is a necessary condition of any consideration being a reason to do a particular act that there must be a possible deliberative route that the relevant agent can use that would lead the agent to do the act in question *because* of the consideration in question (the “deliberative constraint”). In offering a fresh defense of these views, Paakkunainen responds to objections provided by recent critics.⁷

David McNaughton and Piers Rawling discuss a wide range of views concerning the nature of motivating reasons and normative reasons, defending an externalist “two-tier” view of normative reasons, and a form of realism they call “practical normative realism,” against internalist and anti-realist opponents. They cover a lot of ground (some of it also covered in the other four chapters in this part of the Handbook), before arguing against the *prima facie* plausible view that one ought to do what one has most reason to do.

Eric Wiland further explores the nature of motivating reasons, focusing on the question as to whether or not motivating reasons are best understood to be (combinations of) psychological states. After exploring a range of psychologistic and non-psychologistic options in this debate—the two main ones being located in Davidson (1963) and Dancy (2003)—Wiland endorses “naïve action theory,” a view according to which motivating reasons are themselves actions (to use one of his examples: I’m buying some balloons *because* I’m throwing a retirement party), hence are only partly psychological.

Benjamin Wald and Sergio Tenenbaum focus on the causal theory of action defended by Davidson (1963) in their chapter on reasons and action explanation. According to this theory, motivating reasons (or what, as Wald and Tenenbaum point out, Davidson calls “primary” reasons) are belief-desire pairs, and these belief-desire pairs both rationalize and cause our actions. When things go well, they represent normative reasons, which we can thus be said to be acting on (Wald and Tenenbaum do not address the thorny issue of what we should say about motivational reasons and action explanations when things do not go well in this respect, but Wiland addresses this issue in the previous chapter). Although this theory is very popular, it has

⁷ See Brunero (2017) for further discussion of Paakkunainen’s chapter, as well as of the work of one of the key critics of Williams’s form of internalism that Paakkunainen responds to, Julia Markovits (2014).

been recognized since its inception that it faces a problem in the form of a concern about deviant causal chains: it seems possible for any relevant belief-desire pair to cause the agent to behave in the way we might expect her to behave if she were acting on the relevant reason, but for this not to count as acting on the relevant reason (due to a course of events that circumvents agential control). Wald and Tenenbaum suggest that a key component of a solution to this problem is the idea that action has a constitutive or formal aim (for more on this idea, see Chapter 16)—if all actions contain a certain motive, then the presence of this motive throughout a course of action will mark the difference between deviant and non-deviant cases.

Finally, Bart Streumer presents a series of arguments for the very plausible view that it is a necessary condition for any consideration counting as a reason to perform an act that the agent in question be able to perform the act (although it is not the primary goal of his chapter, he also contends that a similar claim holds of reasons for belief). He ends by suggesting that it may, in fact, be of the essence of normative judgments, as compared to merely evaluative judgments, that they are appropriate only when agents can perform the acts in question.

Part III, “Reasons Fundamentalism,” is concerned with accounts of normative reasons that take reasons to be fundamental to normativity, and not capable of further explanation, and with how they fare in relation to competing accounts of reasons. It opens with a chapter by Jonas Olson on the metaphysics of reasons that compares two varieties of non-naturalism concerning the reason relation (robust realism, and the quietist realism defended, in different ways, by Parfit 2011 and Skorupski 2010), first with each other, and then with an important naturalist alternative (Schroeder’s hypotheticalism, 2007). Olson concludes, tentatively, that the turn to reasons may not provide much help in moving beyond longstanding metaethical debates regarding competing forms of realism and anti-realism.

Philip Stratton-Lake focuses on the question of whether the concept of a reason is a basic normative concept, concluding that it is, but also that it is not the sole fundamental normative concept. Along the way, he defends the so called “buck-passing” account of goodness, according to which goodness can be defined in terms of reasons, responding to two serious objections to this account. Although this account of goodness (defended, most famously, by Scanlon 1998), if correct, would not in itself establish that reasons are fundamental, it clearly provides them with a crucial explanatory role. Stratton-Lake also criticizes the attempts to explain reasons in terms of “ought” favored by Broome and by Kearns and Star.

In his contribution to the Handbook, John Broome focuses on reasons fundamentalism, and the “ought” fundamentalism that he contends does a much better job of locating the foundation of normativity. He argues that the best form of reasons fundamentalism is the view that the fundamental normative feature is the relation that holds between a person and an act (or something else represented by a verbal phrase, such as a belief) when a person has reason to do the act in question (or believe, etc.), rather than the view that the property of being a reason is the fundamental feature of normativity. In the course of these arguments, Broome discusses the significance of the relation of *having reason to*—where “reason” is treated as a mass noun, rather than a count noun—which, he notes, may have been acknowledged by Nagel (1970), and has been explored in detail in recent work by Daniel Fogal (2016).

In Part IV, “Reasons Explained,” which focuses on approaches for explaining what normative reasons are, John Brunero first continues the discussion of Broome’s account of reasons, as well as the alternative account favored by Kearns and Star. Both of these accounts promise to explain reasons in other terms. The first appeals to a special notion of a weighing explanation of “ought” facts, and the second to the idea that ordinary facts can be evidence concerning what we ought to do or believe. Using a range of

examples, Brunero argues that neither of these accounts, nor a third account, where reasons are understood to be facts that explain why a particular action or belief would be good in some respect, can deliver on what they promise.

This is not the place to offer a substantial response to the criticisms Brunero offers here of the account of reasons that Kearns and I defend (*reasons as evidence*), but readers may find it helpful if I say something very brief in response. Some of Brunero's criticisms of this account (as well as one of Stratton-Lake's criticisms in Ch. 12, and a number of criticisms published elsewhere) appeal to intuitions about which facts can and cannot be reasons. In general, this type of criticism may be problematic. I think that what is going on in the debate at this point is that two jobs that reasons might be thought to perform in a pervasive, role-fixing manner are being given different emphases: arguably, the most important role that reasons play is that they guide us in our reasoning, but I do not wish to deny that some reasons (I call them fundamental reasons in Star 2015) are also in the fundamental favoring or right-making business. Other philosophers think that favoring of a non-epistemic kind is the (more) fundamental job of reasons. In a recent discussion of the evidence-based account of reasons, one can clearly tell that the author is taking for granted this second view when she writes, "But the fact that Henry ought to study for the exam is clearly not a normative reason for him to do his best in it: it does not count in favor of his doing his best in the exam" (Schmidt 2017: 712). However, this fact *does* count in favor in one sense: it's something that in some not unrealistic contexts it would be appropriate for Henry to use as a guide in his reasoning when he is trying to work out what he ought to do (one can say the same thing about the enablers discussed by Brunero). I agree the relevant fact does not count in favor in a stronger sense than this, but why should we think only things that do so are reasons? Perhaps we should, but we won't settle this question by appeal to intuitions about cases (for some reasons to be suspicious of appeals to intuitions about which facts are and are not reasons, see Schroeder 2007). It's worth noting in this context that Kieran Setiya (2014) and Jonathan Way (2017) defend accounts of reasons that give the reasoning guiding role of reasons an even more central place in explaining what reasons are: roughly speaking, they take reasons to be appropriate premises in pieces of good reasoning.⁸

Nicholas Southwood surveys a number of approaches to explaining the existence of reasons that have been labeled "constructivist" by their supporters, and provides a new, improved characterization of constructivism. The "proceduralist" characterization that can be found in the work of John Rawls (1971) and Christine Korsgaard (1996), and Sharon Street's (2008) "standpoint" characterization are both found wanting. According to the first, truths about reasons depend on the actual or ideal application of a procedure, while, according to the second, truths about reasons depend on what is entailed from within particular evaluative standpoints. Southwood proposes that we instead understand constructivism to be the view that truths about reasons are dependent on prior standards of correct reasoning, and describes some of the advantages of doing so (including that both the proceduralist and the standpoint approaches can be adequately captured by this characterization).

⁸ For more on the reasoning or deliberation guiding role of reasons in relation to the *reasons as evidence* account of reasons, see Ch. 20, Kearns (2016), and Star (2015: ch. 2; forthcoming). Regarding the criticisms that Brunero provides that spring from combining this account of reasons with the probability-raising account of evidence, I admit that these criticisms require us either to give up on that account of evidence or to give up using that account of evidence to explain the weight of reasons, or to say something more complicated than we have in the past about how the weight of reasons is to be explained in terms of epistemic probability.

Paul Katsafanas focuses on constitutivism, which might be considered a close cousin of constructivism.⁹ The constitutivist about practical reason claims that the justification of practical normative claims rests on a certain aim or standard that all actions possess in some essential fashion, and that reflects a fundamental commitment on the part of all agents, insofar as they act at all. Katsafanas surveys a range of attempts to make constitutivism work, and discusses a number of challenges that constitutivist theories face (of particular importance in this tradition is David Velleman’s work, e.g. Velleman 2000). One of the forms of constitutivism that Katsafanas discusses is his own broadly Nietzschean view, according to which agents aim at full-blooded agential activity in every reflective action (this requires approval of one’s own action, as well as that this approval would survive further knowledge concerning its etiology), and also aim at overcoming obstacles or sources of resistance in the pursuit of their ends.

In Part V, “Practical Deliberation,” a variety of ways in which reasons for action are connected to practical reasoning or deliberation are explored in detail. Antti Kauppinen contrasts the approach to practical reasoning that takes it to be a rule-governed process that aims to meet various requirements of rationality with the approach to practical reasoning that takes it to be concerned with responding appropriately to apparent reasons. He contends that the latter is better in some key respects than the former (e.g. it better takes into account the perspective of the agent when reasoning), and that the former, in any case, veers towards the latter when rational requirements or permissions come to be construed in a diachronic rather than a synchronic manner. In part, the chapter may be read as a response to Broome’s (2013) account of reasoning.

Garrett Cullity is similarly interested in the role that the process of responding to reasons plays in practical reasoning, and in particular in the way in which agents can be said to weigh reasons in their deliberations. He is much less sure than Nair and Horty (Chapter 3) that there is something wrong with a “simple” weighing picture of the way reasons are related to each other and to verdicts about what one ought to do, although he carefully considers some challenges to it, including the idea that reasons can be defeated in a manner which amounts to a kind of undercutting, rather than outweighing (what is said here about this issue is worth contrasting with what is said about it in Chapter 3). Other challenges include the idea that the weight of derivative reasons cannot be added to the weight of more fundamental reasons, the idea that incommensurability sometimes gets in the way of weighing reasons, and the idea that certain “exclusionary” reasons may be reasons not to be guided by other reasons. Cullity concludes that, while some small modifications concerning its account of the structure of reasons, and one significant modification concerning its account of rational deliberation, are required, the simple weighing picture remains intact.

The last two chapters in this section of the Handbook move on from the reasoning theme to consider special features of the part of deliberation that is concerned with the making of choices. One of the key ways in which we might think the simple weighing picture is flawed is explored in detail by Joshua Gert. It seems that when we make choices, we are often confronted with situations where there are many equally rational options, any of which might reasonably be pursued. Gert considers the question of how this can be true if the rational status of an option is simply a function of the weights of the applicable reasons, as well as the question of how it is possible to make choices in such situations that are not simply arbitrary. He considers four strategies for addressing these questions, including the idea that focusing on incommensurability might help (here he discusses Ruth Chang’s influential work on this topic; see in

⁹ Or, perhaps, a form of constructivism (Bagnoli 2017, for instance, characterizes constitutivism in this second way).

particular Chang 2009), and his own idea that the justifying strengths and requiring strengths of practical reasons are separate and can come apart.

Stephen Kearns's contribution can be split in two. To begin with, Kearns explores the idea that when agents make choices, they choose for (apparent) reasons. After considering a number of arguments for and against this idea, he concludes that, at the very least, it is highly problematic. This is interesting, because one might have thought that something that seems so central to our lives—the making of choices—must itself be directly reasons-responsive. The second half of the chapter focuses on popular reasons-responsive accounts of responsibility, highlighting reasons for thinking that the approach to understanding responsibility for our actions common to such accounts seems extremely plausible. Kearns then argues that these accounts of responsibility should accept that reasons are best understood as consisting in evidence of either the normative or evaluative status of actions. He concludes by discussing connections between the ideas explored in the two halves of the chapter.

The contributions to Part VI, “Reasoning and Rationality,” are concerned with ways in which rational requirements or norms, reasoning, and reasons are related. Jonathan Way focuses on the relationship between reasons, practical as well as epistemic, and rational requirements of coherence. One way to explain why there is something wrong with having inconsistent beliefs or inconsistent intentions is to appeal to rational requirements that direct us not to have such beliefs or intentions. Way discusses some reasons for doubting that there are always reasons to conform to such norms. He then turns to consider some problems for the alternative way of explaining why there is something wrong with incoherence, developed by Kolodny (2007), which appeals to the idea that incoherence always ensures that you have an attitude you should not have, or lack an attitude you should have. Way concludes that it is too soon to declare either side the victor in this debate.

One of the most interesting essays discussed in the recent literature on reasoning and rationality is Lewis Carroll's “What the Tortoise Said to Achilles” (1895). Carroll highlights a sceptical concern with the use of rational principles when reasoning: how are we entitled to rely on rational principles in the absence of further reasoning that first establishes that we are so entitled? If this concern is taken seriously, a regress is quickly generated, since it seems there can be no end to the request for further justifications of the same kind. Corine Besson focuses on this regress problem, first attending to the issue of how best to interpret it (the description of it I just provided rides roughshod over difficulties here), and then argues that the regress problem actually fails to establish anything substantive about the connection between acceptance of basic principles and reasoning that corresponds to them, at least in the absence of contentious and usually undefended assumptions.

In a chapter that bridges this section of the Handbook and the next, Clayton Littlejohn explores the relationship between epistemic reasons and epistemic rationality, providing a negative assessment of (internalist) evidentialism in the process. Evidentialism is *prima facie* attractive. It might be thought to provide a rough analogue to the simple weighing picture of reasons for action referred to above: what we rationally ought to believe depends on what the strongest evidence relations (reasons) are, where a subject's evidence is construed as supervening on the subject's non-factive mental states (“non-factive” so as to exclude wordly facts such as would need to be taken into account if one allowed knowledge to count as a mental state that can make a difference to a subject's evidence). Amongst other things, Littlejohn provides reasons for thinking that there is no escaping a need for substantive rational norms that directly provide us with reasons (he contrasts these “norm-reasons” with “evidential-reasons”). If he is right about this, reasons

for belief cannot be simply identified with evidence, and the analogue of the simple weighing picture for reasons for belief must be inadequate.

Part VII, “Epistemic Reasons,” is concerned with the topic of reasons for belief. Kurt Sylvan and Ernest Sosa argue against the “reasons first” thesis that epistemic reasons are the fundamental entities when it comes to epistemic normativity—they contend that the virtue-theoretic property of competence instead plays this fundamental role. That being said, they also contend that reasons for belief play an important mid-level role in the normative landscape. Like Hawthorne and Magidor in Chapter 5, they present a view about what is required in order to possess a reason, but they think that what is required for a reason to count as possessed is competence, rather than knowledge: this condition is weaker, as one can have competent or incompetent intuitions, where intuitions are understood to be attractions to assent that are not yet beliefs, and not themselves grounded in reasons. According to Sylvan and Sosa, possessed reasons (reasons one is competently responding to) ground facts about what one rationally ought to believe. They argue that propositional justification requires no less and no more than the possession of sufficient epistemic reasons, and that forming one’s beliefs on the basis of such reasons is all that is required for doxastic justification.

Some worry that epistemic reasons, as distinct from practical reasons, are not normative at all. Kathrin Glüer and Åsa Wikforss address this issue by considering two views as to what might make reasons for belief normative. The first is the fundamentalist view that all that ensures that reasons for belief are normative is the fact that reasons for belief are not merely explanatory reasons, but normative reasons. This view takes it that the distinction between merely explanatory reasons and normative reasons can be applied to reasons for belief just as it has been applied to reasons for action. Glüer and Wikforss argue that this is not the case. The second view has it that reasons for belief are normative in virtue of their relation to facts concerning epistemic justification. Glüer and Wikforss distinguish between a weaker and a stronger version of this view, and argue that neither is compelling. Their conclusion is that the common assumption that reasons for belief are normative is not, in fact, well grounded. In this respect, they differ from the other contributors on this topic.

“Reasons first” approaches to epistemology certainly take reasons for belief to be normative. Errol Lord favors one such approach. Here he follows the lead of Schroeder (2015), although he claims to do a better job than Schroeder does of explaining the difference between true belief and knowledge by reference to reasons for belief. As is extremely well known in philosophy, Edmund Gettier (1963) established that justified true belief is not knowledge (or, at least, he established this as long as one sticks to a standard, traditional conception of justification). This spawned many attempts to provide a fourth and final necessary condition for knowledge. This research program has fallen out of favor (see Williamson 2000 for reasons to think this is as things should be), but Lord hopes to revitalize it. He argues for a condition on knowledge he calls “security.” This is similar to a condition known as “safety,” which has been much discussed in recent epistemology (Williamson 2000 again being pivotal here). Whereas the safety principle specifies a relatively simple anti-luck modal condition true beliefs need to satisfy if they are to be candidates for knowledge, the security principle is a modal condition that refers to objective reasons for belief that agents are in a position to access.

Following on from the preceding discussions of epistemic reasons in general, Part VIII, “Types and Sources of Reasons for Belief,” turns to consider how it is that perception and testimony, in particular, provide us with reasons for belief, how knowledge and understanding are related to reasons for belief, and whether or not practical considerations ever provide us with reasons for belief. Declan Smithies focuses on

perception, endorsing the commonsense view that perception is a key source of reasons for beliefs about the external world, and enquiring as to how and when perception provides such reasons, and what exactly these reasons consist in. He begins by arguing that there is a tight connection between rationality and the reasons for belief provided by perception (in passing, he endorses such a connection between reasons and rationality in general), then responds to some challenges to the idea that it's possible for perception to provide us with reason for belief. He subsequently compares two views concerning the conditions under which we access reasons for belief via perception. The first view is that perception provides us with reasons by providing us with knowledge of the external world, and the second view is that such reasons are provided via representations of the external world. Smithies argues that the second, "content" view is superior to the first, "knowledge" view, and proposes an ontology of reasons that fits well with the content view: reasons for belief are facts about one's own mental states that are luminous (luminous facts are those that one is in a position to know obtain when they do; crucially, actually knowing that they obtain is not required for the possession of reasons).

Sanford Goldberg surveys the literature on testimony with a key question in mind: when a person asserts something, does this, by itself, provide his or her audience with a reason to believe the proposition asserted, just as perception might be thought to immediately provide us with reasons for belief (this is a view about testimony that goes by the name "non-reductionism"), or must there first be in play independent reasons to accept that the assertion is being provided by a reliable source ("reductionism")? Goldberg identifies an attractive third option, "anti-individualism," which may or may not be combined with anti-reductionism about testimonial reasons. According to this view, it is a mistake to simply focus on the epistemic position of the individual recipient of testimony: the weight of the epistemic reason that is provided by a piece of testimony may (in part) be a function of the epistemic status of the mental states that stand behind the proposition being asserted in the first place.

Jonathan Kvanvig is much less sanguine than other contributors to the Handbook about the prospects in epistemology for reduction, or the identification of a fundamental normative concept. The intellectual achievements that result in knowledge, understanding, and locating reasons for one's claims all seem to be of significant value, and it is unclear which of these, if any, is most basic. Kvanvig assesses various reductive options here, including the reasons first approach, the knowledge first approach, and the idea that understanding is a species of knowledge (regarding the first two topics, the discussion concerns issues also discussed in Chapters 5, 24, 26, and 27). Understanding is particularly interesting in the present context because its significance in our mental lives suggests that the general focus in epistemology on connections between justification, knowledge, and reasons may be overly narrow. At least, it will suggest this if the arguments Kvanvig surveys for thinking that understanding is not in fact reducible to knowledge succeed. In particular, it has been claimed, by Kvanvig himself (2003), that understanding, unlike knowledge, can be present in Gettier cases.

In his contribution to the Handbook, Andrew Reisner continues to explore a theme present in earlier work (especially Reisner 2007; 2008): he has for some time been arguing against the almost universally accepted view that there are no pragmatic reasons for belief (as distinct from reasons to do things to bring it about that we believe propositions, whose existence few doubt). Here he first surveys arguments for and against the view that all reasons for belief are evidential—and that therefore none are pragmatic—concluding that the case for thinking that this is true is actually quite weak. Reisner then turns to discuss a number of arguments that speak in favor of the conclusion that there are pragmatic reasons for belief, including his own

arguments, partly based on original thought experiments, as well as arguments from McCormick (2015), and Marušić (2015), amongst others.

Part IX, “Types and Sources of Reasons for Action,” covers a swath of ways in which practical reasons may be divided up into different categories. The distinction between instrumental and non-instrumental reasons is one of the most frequently relied upon distinctions in the literature, yet the account of instrumental reasons that Niko Kolodny presents here goes beyond much of this literature in one key way: he contends that it is a mistake to focus on necessary or sufficient means when providing such an account. We rarely reason in a way where we take a means to an end to be either completely necessary or completely sufficient for achieving some end. Rather, we typically take it that a range of means are more or less likely to bring about some end. In line with this observation, Kolodny argues for a principle, “General Transmission,” that explains when it is that we have instrumental reasons to do things. This principle is designed to respect the idea that non-instrumental reasons transmit to reasons to take various means in ways that are probabilizing and non-superfluous. He ends by considering the issue of how instrumental reasons are related to instrumental rationality, assuming General Transmission is correct (see also the discussion of Kolodny’s work in Chapter 21).

Doug Portmore attempts to answer the question of whether or not all reasons are “teleological,” paying close attention to practical reasons, but also considering epistemic reasons. According to Portmore’s definition, a teleological reason is a reason to do (or believe) a certain thing that is a reason in virtue of the fact that doing the act in question (or believing the proposition in question) either would itself promote a certain end (in which case the reason is a “direct” teleological reason) or is appropriately related to something else that would promote that end (in which case the reason is an “indirect” teleological reason). There are various arguments that not all reasons can be teleological, and Portmore considers a number of them carefully. For instance, one might think that to say reasons for belief are teleological assimilates standard evidence-centered reasons for belief to pragmatic reasons for belief, or implies, counterintuitively, that one has reason to believe contrary to the evidence if doing so will promote the production of true beliefs in the long term. Or one might think that there is an important way of valuing people that cannot be understood in terms of promoting an end, and that we have reason to respect people by valuing them in this way. Portmore argues that such apparently non-teleological ideas can be “teleologized,” that is, reframed in such a way that they are not exceptions to the thesis that all reasons are teleological, while ensuring that the basic insights behind them remain intact.

Andrew Sepielli discusses the distinction, endorsed by some philosophers and rejected by others, between “subjective” and “objective” reasons. Sometimes we focus on the reasons that people appear to have, given their beliefs and evidence (as when we might say a conscientious doctor with limited evidence available to her didn’t act wrongly in prescribing a particular medicine, even though the medicine killed her patient). At other times, we focus on the way things really are in the world. One natural thought is that these are just two different, acceptable ways of talking about reasons. Sepielli calls people who think that there is no deep disagreement going on in such cases “Dividers,” and people who think that we should adopt one, and not the other, way of talking about reasons, “Debaters.” He provides a slew of considerations for and against the views of each, and makes some progress in adjudicating between them. Along the way, he discusses normative uncertainty (uncertainty as to what the correct normative view is), and points out that one attractive option is to be a Divider about reasons, but a Debater about moral obligation.

Roger Crisp explores the distinction between prudential and moral reasons, building on earlier work (especially Crisp 2006). He argues that moral reasons are those reasons that must be described in ineliminably moral terminology that answers to core moral emotions (e.g. blame, shame, and guilt). A number of views that self-consciously collapse the distinction between prudential and moral reasons, either in an egoistic or in an impartialist direction, are explored in detail. Despite the attractions of egoism and impartialism, many philosophers continue to try to make sense of the idea that we have both moral and prudential reasons, and Crisp outlines and assesses a range of “dualistic” options. As he does so, it becomes clear how difficult it is to do justice to both kinds of reasons, in theory and practice.

The distinction between “agent-relative” and “agent-neutral” reasons has received much attention in recent work in ethics, as philosophers have attempted to make sense of the structure of our ordinary moral commitments, and develop ethical theories that respect certain of these commitments (e.g. that I have much stronger reasons to help my friends than I have to help strangers, and that I have much stronger reasons to not lie than to ensure that other adults don’t lie). Krister Bykvist argues that, despite the fact that the distinction has lately received a good deal of attention, it is still very unclear what exactly it amounts to. He surveys a range of options, and argues that none of them are satisfactory, at least if one is trying to provide a distinction for general use that does not rest on contentious assumptions in normative ethics.

Many of our practical reasons, especially our moral reasons, seem closely connected to general principles. There are principles that tell us what it is right or wrong to do, and principles that tell us what there is *pro tanto* reason to do, or to not do. Or so many of us think. Particularists (of one key variety) deny that principles have any kind of fundamental role to play in either ethical theory or practice (Dancy 1993, 2004). Pekka Väyrynen surveys the generalism-particularism debate concerning the role of moral principles and their relation to reasons. He distinguishes between two roles that principles might be thought to play: we can think of them either as standards that apply to our acts, or as guides that can be relied on when making decisions. Exploring these roles in turn, Väyrynen argues that in both cases sophisticated defenders of generalism have good responses available to particularist challenges. A significant resource available to generalists is the option of relying on hedged principles that admit of exceptions (e.g. it is generally wrong to lie), both when it comes to providing explanations of particular moral facts and when it comes to practical deliberation.

Most of the Handbook is concerned with reasons for action and reasons for belief, but Part X, “Reasons Difficult to Categorize,” contains chapters that focus on domains where it seems attractive to say that talk of reasons is appropriate, but where it isn’t at all obvious how best to classify the reasons in question. Ulrike Heuer begins this section with a discussion of reasons to intend actions. One might think it clear not only that such reasons are practical reasons (although some have argued that intentions are a special class of beliefs, and many accept that intentions are subject to more constraints with respect to related beliefs than desires are), but also that they simply mirror reasons for action. That is to say, one might think that reasons to intend to do acts simply ride on the back of reasons to do the acts in question. Heuer demonstrates that this claim faces serious hurdles. She distinguishes between the idea that whenever one has a reason to intend to do an act, there is reason to do that act, and the idea that whenever one has a reason to do an act, there is reason to intend to do that act (the mirroring claim combines these two ideas). The first idea seems to run afoul of certain “non-standard” reasons, often called “state-given” reasons, to intend (as may beliefs; see Chapter 30). The second idea is more widely accepted than the first (which is not to say that rejection of the first idea is now standard, by any means), but Heuer provides a number of original arguments that challenge it.

Rather than try to address all of the ways in which emotions may be thought to be related to reasons, Christine Tappolet focuses on the “perceptual theory” of emotion, according to which emotions are perceptual experiences of values, and considers what this theory might tell us about the relation between practical reasons and emotions. She begins by defending the theory against some popular competitors, and then argues that emotions enable us to track our practical reasons, and may even themselves be reasons-responsive, when a certain key condition is met. She contends that such reasons-responsiveness is even available in some cases where agents act akratically (that is, against their own better judgment), such as in the much-discussed Huck Finn case. The condition required for acting on an emotion in a reasons-responsive manner is a condition of virtuous “standby control”: the relevant agent is disposed not to act on the emotion(s) in question if it would be reasonable for her to believe that doing so would prevent her from correctly tracking reasons (here Tappolet draws on Jones 2003).

Andrew McGonigal contends that aesthetic reasons include both practical and epistemic reasons. He discusses some of the complexities involved in trying to determine when exactly reasons get to count as aesthetic, before focusing on two important features of aesthetic reasons: they are connected to “pleasures-in-experience” in a distinctive way, and they are less authoritative than standard moral and epistemic reasons. With respect to the second of these features, McGonigal notes that it appears correct to describe aesthetic reasons as possessing it partly because there is much more room for faultless disagreements when it comes to such reasons, and also because we do not appear to have aesthetic duties. These observations most naturally lead to an ant-realist view concerning aesthetic reasons, but McGonigal also sketches a realist account of aesthetic reasons that might be thought to provide a reasonable alternative to aesthetic anti-realism.

The focus in Part XI, “Skepticism about Reasons,” is on reasons for doubting that we are generally able to have proper epistemic access to normative reasons. Caitrin Donovan, Cordelia Fine, and Jeanette Kennett focus on a form of skepticism that receives support from recent empirical work in psychology that suggests, first, that our reasons for action are different than what we take them to be, and, second, that our ordinary reasoning is not generally able to arrive at reliable judgments about our reasons. They argue that, although such work does throw light on ways in which our reasoning about reasons is influenced by a host of factors that are such that they somewhat undermine our reliability, our explicit reasoning processes are more in control of moral cognition than such skepticism acknowledges.

Terence Cuneo assesses the “debunkers puzzle,” which has been much discussed since Sharon Street’s (2006) statement of it. As Cuneo construes it, this is the puzzle of understanding how moral realism can be squared with a naturalistic, evolutionary account of the development of our capacity for forming moral judgments. It takes a particularly stark form when the type of realism in question is non-naturalist, and when we focus on (apparent) moral knowledge. Cuneo argues that the debunker’s puzzle can really only undermine moral non-naturalism if it relies on a strong and contentious claim about the way evolutionary forces have shaped our capacity for making moral judgments. He subsequently points out that the debunker may reinforce her view by contending that moral beliefs must be sensitive to the moral facts if they are to constitute knowledge, and that non-naturalists owe us a story about how this can be so. The chapter concludes with a positive non-naturalist proposal.

Part XII, “Normativity, Meaning, and the Mind,” contains three chapters on possible ways in which normativity may be related to our use of concepts and language. Hannah Ginsborg’s topic is the idea that our concepts, quite generally (not just the normative concepts discussed in Chapter 1), are themselves intrinsically normative, where this might be taken to mean either that they can be identified with rules or norms, or that

their application is governed by rules or norms. After making it clear why we should think some proponents of the view that concepts are normative are really only committed to the second of these views, Ginsborg raises a problem for the stronger view that concepts can be identified with norms, and sketches a Kantian solution to this problem.

Where Ginsborg considers the prospects for two ways in which concepts might be thought to govern thinking in general, David Liebesman considers the prospects for two ways in which linguistic meaning might be thought to govern our speech in general. Following Kripke (1982), we might think that facts about meaning determine how we ought to speak, or following Davidson (1973), we might think that meaning facts are determined by norms of rationality (in the second case, meaning facts might be said to govern our speech in an intermediary fashion). Liebesman does not aim to decisively rule in or out either of these ideas, but clarifies some of the key challenges that they face. He finishes by stepping back from these views to consider how they are related to a number of different goals we might think a theory of meaning facts should pursue.

Anandi Hattiangadi (2007) has previously argued that meaning is not normative, in the first of the two senses that Liebesman discusses. In the final chapter of the Handbook, Hattiangadi focuses on the highly general problem of intentionality, which is the problem of explaining why any arbitrary sentence or thought has the particular semantic properties it has, rather than the semantic properties of some other sentence or thought. It might be thought that it will help to answer this “hard” question if we claim that intentionality itself is normative, but Hattiangadi argues that the “hard” problem remains even if intentionality itself is normative. On the way to this conclusion, she considers four different forms the view that intentionality is normative can take. She contends that there are good reasons to doubt that reference to normativity needs to be an ingredient in a reductive explanation of intentionality.

The philosophical literature on reasons and normativity continues to expand on a rapid basis, and I am only too aware of the fact that many significant contributions to this literature must go unmentioned here. At the same time, the fact that this body of literature is large and continuing to expand reflects the importance of this fairly new field of study, and the extent to which many interesting issues are being discussed within it. It is impossible to predict with any certainty where future contributions to this field will lead. Still, it seems a safe bet that work in this area in the near to medium future will, in addition to exploring narrowly focused issues in more depth, continue the trend of crossing sub-disciplinary boundaries in order to focus on metanormative issues, as well as continue the closely related trend of addressing the question of how best to construe the basic structural relations between a range of core normative and evaluative notions, and their extensions (reasons, ought, fittingness, goodness, rationality, etc.).¹⁰

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