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Reasons

John Broome

1. Introduction and Preliminaries

Within the philosophy of normativity, the 1970s was the age of the discovery of reasons.¹ Joseph Raz was one of the first explorers. In his *Practical Reason and Norms*, Raz carefully codified the concept of a reason, and he has been a leader in its development ever since. Since those years of discovery, reasons have come to dominate thinking about normativity. Some authors now believe normativity consists of little else. Raz himself says: ‘The normativity of all that is normative consists in the way it is, or provides, or is otherwise related to reasons.’² All is reasons.

But it is not. Reasons are undoubtedly important, but normativity has other important features, and our preoccupation with reasons distracts us away from them. I think we need to look at normativity more widely. I shall begin this paper with an example of the harm that is done by our preoccupation. My description in this section is brief; it is merely a preview of arguments to come in section 5.

¹ I take this picturesque idea from the tentative title of Derek Parfit’s forthcoming book *Rediscovering Reasons*. Michael Bratman reminded me that the concept of a reason first became prominent in the philosophy of action, and only later in the philosophy of normativity. For instance, it is in Elizabeth Anscombe’s *Intention* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957). Interestingly, Raffaele Rodogno has shown me a discussion of reasons within moral philosophy dating from 1952: Austin Duncan-Jones, *Butler’s Moral Philosophy* (London: Penguin, 1952), 77–86.

² Joseph Raz, *Engaging Reason: On the Theory of Value and Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 67.

Often ‘you ought’ governs a simple infinitival phrase. You ought to do something, know something, intend something, or believe something, for instance. But also often, ‘you ought’ governs a conditional: you ought (to Φ if X). The requirements of correct reasoning take this form, for instance. One of them is the requirement that, when a proposition q follows obviously from another p , you ought (to believe q if you believe p). You ought (to believe the world was made in less than a week, if you believe the world was made in six days).

I am forced to the ugly expedient of using brackets in order to avoid an ambiguity. I do not say that, if you believe p , you ought to believe q . That may well be false, even when q follows obviously from p . No one ought to believe the world was made in less than a week; the evidence is strongly against it. Even if you believe the world was made in six days, still it is not the case that you ought to believe it was made in less than a week. Nevertheless, you ought (to believe the world was made in less than a week, if you believe it was made in six days). You can satisfy this requirement either by not believing the world was made in six days or by believing it was made in less than a week. As it happens, you ought to satisfy it the first way. You ought not to believe the world was made in six days, even if you do.

As a useful piece of terminology, when you ought (to Φ if X), I say that X normatively requires you to Φ .³ Believing the world was made in six days normatively requires you to believe it was made in less than a week.

Another example: intending an end normatively requires you to intend whatever you believe is a necessary means to the end. You ought (to intend to M if you intend to E and you believe your M -ing is a necessary means to your E -ing). I do not say that, if you intend an end, you ought to intend whatever you believe is a necessary means. That may be false. If you ought not to intend the end, it may well be false that you ought to intend whatever you believe is a necessary means to it. Still, intending the end normatively requires you to intend whatever you believe is a necessary means to it.

Relations among your beliefs and intentions are regulated by oughts that govern these relations—‘wide-scope oughts’ I shall call them. They imply no narrow-scope normative conditions on individual beliefs or intentions. This seems to me clear and straightforward, but many authors do

³ When I introduced this term in my ‘Normative Requirements’ (*Ratio* 12 (1999), 398–419), I gave it a slightly narrower meaning.

not recognize it. I think this is partly because they habitually think only about reasons. They treat all normative questions as questions about what is or is not a reason for what. They ask: when q follows obviously from p , is believing p a reason to believe q ? Or: is intending an end a reason to intend a means to it?

Intending an end clearly stands in some sort of normative relation to intending a means. So if the only normative relation you think of is the relation of being a reason to, you are likely to think that intending an end is a reason to intend a means. Then your view implies that, if you intend an end, you have a reason to intend a means. That is to say, if you intend an end, the narrow-scope normative property of your having a reason to applies to your intending a means.

But this is to misunderstand the logical structure of the situation. Suppose you intend to visit Rum, and the only way you can get there is to take the boat. A reason to intend to take the boat is that the boat will carry you to the wild and beautiful island of Rum. This reason exists independently of your intention to visit Rum. But if this intention was also a further reason to intend to take the boat, it would be a reason you create yourself by forming the intention to visit Rum. It is puzzling how you could create a reason in that way; Michael Bratman calls it ‘bootstrap-ping’ the reason into existence.⁴ At any rate, this reason would have to be a different sort from the first. So the idea that your intention constitutes a reason raises the possibility of different sorts of reason. This is the ‘dualism of reasons’ that T. M. Scanlon considers and rejects in ‘Reasons: A Puzzling Duality?’, chapter 10 in this volume.

But actually there is a difference of scope, not merely of sort. A wide-scope ought governs the relation between intending to visit Rum and intending to take the boat: you ought (to intend to take the boat if you intend to visit Rum). On the other hand, the fact that the boat will carry you to this wild and beautiful island gives you a narrow-scope reason: it makes it the case that you have a reason (to intend to take the boat). This is a major difference in logical structure. To miss it is a serious error caused by a preoccupation with reasons.

I think we should reassess the importance of reasons. We need to codify the concept of a reason once more, and mark off its boundaries. This paper

⁴ Michael E. Bratman, *Intention, Plans and Practical Reason* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987; reissued by CSLI Publications, 1999), 24–7.

tries to do that. I shall boldly define a reason. Indeed, I shall distinguish two normative senses of ‘a reason’, and define them in sections 2 and 3 respectively. More precisely, I shall define two senses of ‘a reason for you to Φ ’. The second of my senses is a *pro tanto* reason, and in section 4 I shall consider how prevalent *pro tanto* reasons are. Then in sections 5 and 6, I shall identify features of normativity that are often thought to be reasons, but are not reasons as I define them. I shall argue that to call them reasons is to misunderstand them.

Ought facts

The key to understanding the concept of a reason is to look at how facts of a particular type are explained. I mean facts of the form that *P* ought to Φ , where ‘*P*’ stands for the name of an agent and ‘to Φ ’ for an infinitival phrase. I shall call them ‘ought facts’. An example is the fact that you ought to carry an umbrella in Glasgow. If you think there are no such facts, understand me to be speaking of ought truths instead. If you think there are no such truths, this paper will probably not make much sense to you.

To be friendly, I shall generally speak of *you* instead of a universal person *P*. What I say about you applies to anyone, of course. But unfortunately, I cannot avoid using the letter ‘ Φ ’. I want to cover all normative cases where ‘you ought’ governs an infinitival phrase. There is no universal verb in English that covers all these cases, so I have to resort to the schematic letter. Moreover, I intend ‘You ought to Φ ’ to cover some cases that, strictly grammatically, it does not cover. For example, I intend it to cover ‘You ought not to dive here’ and ‘You ought either to forget her insult or challenge her’.

Some infinitival phrases that substitute for ‘to Φ ’ refer to actings, intendings, believings, knowings, and so on. Others cannot be so neatly categorized. For example, when you ought either to believe *p* or not believe *q*, ‘you ought’ governs a phrase that refers to a relation between believings, rather than an individual believing. For another example, in his account of exclusionary reasons, Raz argues that sometimes you ought not to do a particular act for a particular reason, and he does not mean simply that you ought not to do this particular act.⁵ So we have to allow ‘not to *G* for

⁵ Joseph Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms* (London: Hutchinson, 1975; reissued by Princeton University Press, 1990; repr. Oxford University Press, 1999), 185.

reason X as a substitution for 'to Φ '. 'You ought' can govern all sorts of things.

Ought and explain

I shall take the concept of ought and the concept of explain as primitives. I shall use them rather than try to give an account of them. However, these concepts are afflicted by some ambiguities, and I need to specify how I shall use them.

First, 'ought'. This word can sometimes be used non-normatively. For example, suppose you ought to be exhausted by now—the 'ought' in that sentence is non-normative. But in this paper, I use 'ought' only normatively. Of facts of the form that P ought to Φ , I count as ought facts only those in which the ought is normative.

Some philosophers think 'ought' also has several normative senses. They think, for one thing, that it sometimes means the same as 'morally ought'. I would be surprised if this were so. The effect of an adverb is not usually to give a new sense to the verb it governs. There is no sense of 'finished' in which it means the same as 'partly finished' or 'hurriedly finished'. So I doubt that 'ought' can correctly be used to mean the same as 'morally ought'. However, if it can, that is not how I use it. I do not treat 'ought' as a solemn word with moral connotations. I treat it as our ordinary, workaday, normative verb.

Next, 'explain'. First, this term is ambiguous in common usage. In one of its senses, Darwin explained evolution. In another sense, *The Origin of Species* explains evolution. In another, natural selection explains evolution. I shall stick to this third sense. As I use 'explain', an explanandum is explained by an explanans. It is not explained by a description of the explanans, nor by a describer of it.

'Explanation' is correspondingly ambiguous in common usage. It may refer to an act of explaining, to a description of an explanans, or to the explanans itself. I shall stick to the third sense. With a little regimentation, I shall take an explanation always to be a fact: a fact that explains an explanandum. I take the explanation of evolution to be the fact that natural selection occurs.

Second, although I have just specified a limit on my use of 'explain' and 'explanation', in another respect I use these terms broadly. When I say one fact X explains another Y , I mean simply that Y obtains because of X . As I

understand it, the explaining relation is merely the inverse of the because relation. I have nothing to say about the nature of these relations; I take them as primitive.

Some philosophers use ‘explanation’ more specifically, sometimes for causal explanations only. But many explanations are not causal. For example, here is a grammatical explanation of why ‘ought’ takes an infinitive and not a ‘that’ clause: ‘ought’ is an auxiliary rather than a lexical verb, and an auxiliary always takes an infinitive (with or without ‘to’). I shall mostly be dealing with non-causal explanations in this paper.

Third, although I shall not try to describe the nature of the explaining or because relation, I do need to say something about the individuation of explanations. Suppose Joanne broke a slate a while ago, and as a result the roof leaks. It rained last night, and today the carpet is wet. When we enquire why the carpet is wet, you might say the explanation is that it rained last night. I might say it is that Joanne broke a slate. Someone else might say it is that the roof leaks. The three of us make statements that are literally contraries: ‘The explanation of why the carpet is wet is that it rained last night’, ‘The explanation of why the carpet is wet is that Joanne broke a slate’, and ‘The explanation of why the carpet is wet is that the roof leaks’. Still, our explanations are not rivals, and we would not feel we were contradicting each other. Nor would you be inclined to draw back from your assertion, and say only that the fact it rained last night is *an* explanation of why the carpet is wet. That would conversationally suggest it is only a putative explanation, which might turn out not to be the explanation at all. So our use of articles is confusing. What is going on?

My suggestion is that we think there is really one big explanation of why the carpet is wet. It is a complex fact that includes as parts all the separate facts the three of us mentioned. Each of us is picking out a part to stand in for the whole. We call it *the* explanation because it is standing in for the one big explanation. We are employing a sort of synecdoche. Which part we pick out will depend on our context: our background knowledge, our interests in the matter, and so on.

Whether or not this suggestion about individuation is right, I think we should not fuss about the confusing state of the articles ‘a’ and ‘the’ attached to ‘explanation’. It is generally a mistake to look for *the* canonical explanation of some fact. We may accept several different facts as the explanation, and prefer one to another simply according to context.

Non-normative reasons

Another confusing feature of English is that the explanation of why a fact obtains is also called ‘the reason’ why it obtains. Here, ‘the reason’ is used in a non-normative sense. In this sense, it may be applied to any explanation, whether of a normative or a non-normative fact. The reason why pigs cannot fly is that they have no wings.

A useful distinguishing mark is that ‘the reason’ in this non-normative sense is usually followed by ‘why’. Unfortunately, that is not invariably so; it is not so in ‘The reason for the cow’s death was BSE’. But, with or without a ‘why’, we must distinguish this sense of ‘reason’ from normative senses. This paper is about normative senses, but I cannot ignore the non-normative sense because it strongly influences the normative ones, as we shall see immediately.

2. Perfect Reasons

Preliminaries over, I come to explanations of ought facts. Suppose you ought to Φ . And suppose the explanation of this fact is some other fact X . Then X is the reason why you ought to Φ . This is only because X is the explanation of why you ought to Φ , and ‘the reason why’ is being used to mean the same as ‘the explanation of why’. Since it means the same as the non-normative expression ‘the explanation of why’, ‘the reason why’ is here not normative.

In this case, the relation of being the reason why holds between the fact X and the fact that you ought to Φ . The latter fact is normative, but nevertheless the relation is non-normative. Normative facts can have non-normative properties. For example, if you ought to shut up and I say so, then the normative fact that you ought to shut up has the non-normative property of being stated by me.

However, in ‘ X is the reason why you ought to Φ ’, the non-normative ‘reason’ is so closely conjoined with the normative ‘ought’ that we find it impossible to resist a slide. We slide from ‘ X is the reason why you ought to Φ ’ to ‘ X is the reason for you to Φ ’, meaning exactly the same thing by it. The non-normative ‘reason’ (meaning explanation) slides into the normative ‘ought’, yielding a normative sense of ‘reason’ that combines the meaning of both.

In this sense, a reason for you to Φ is defined as an explanation of why you ought to Φ . So we have a reason defined in terms of the two notions of ought and explanation.

Later, I shall define a second normative sense of ‘a reason’. I shall distinguish a reason in this first sense by calling it ‘a perfect reason’. A perfect reason for you to Φ is defined as a fact that explains why you ought to Φ .

All the complications of the notion of explanation are inherited by the notion of a perfect reason, and it is not my business to sort them out. An explanation need not be full or complete, and what counts as an explanation may depend on the context. For instance, it may depend on our background knowledge. All this is true of a perfect reason, too. So long as a fact explains why you ought to Φ , it is a perfect reason for you to Φ .

A perfect reason therefore need not be a unique canonical reason. Suppose you ought not to drink home-made grappa because it damages your health. The fact that home-made grappa damages your health explains why you ought not to drink it, so it is a perfect reason for you not to drink it. Another explanation of why you ought not to drink home-made grappa is that it contains methyl alcohol. This is not a rival explanation; it is consistent with the first. So a perfect reason for you not to drink home-made grappa is that it contains methyl alcohol. Now we have two distinct perfect reasons for you not to drink home-made grappa. This is confusing, but only because the individuation of explanations is confusing. We need not fuss about it.

‘You ought to Φ ’ and ‘There is a perfect reason for you to Φ ’ are equivalent statements. That is to say, you ought to Φ if and only if you have a perfect reason to Φ . If there is a perfect reason for you to Φ , this means there is an explanation of why you ought to Φ . But that can only be so if, actually, you ought to Φ . Conversely, if you ought to Φ , no doubt there is an explanation of this fact; presumably no ought fact is inexplicable. Consequently, there is a perfect reason for you to Φ .

However, ‘There is a perfect reason for you to Φ ’ does not *mean* the same as ‘You ought to Φ ’. The equivalence of the two sentences is not analytic, because it is not analytic that, if you ought to Φ , there is an explanation of this fact. ‘There is a perfect reason for you to Φ ’ means more than ‘You ought to Φ ’. It means you ought to Φ and this fact has an explanation. The concept of a perfect reason is complex, incorporating the two elements of normativity and explanation. In the next section we shall see that the same is true of the concept of a *pro tanto* reason.

The element of explanation in a reason must not be forgotten. Raz says: ‘We can think of [the reasons for an action] as the facts statements of which form the premises of a sound inference to the conclusion that, other things being equal, the agent ought to perform the action.’⁶ This must be wrong. Section 6 identifies one fault in it. In his ‘Enticing Reasons’ in this volume, Jonathan Dancy identifies another. He points out that, by Raz’s criterion, conclusive evidence that you ought to perform an action would be itself a reason to perform the action, and that is certainly not so. Reasons do not merely imply the agent ought to perform the action; they explain why she ought to. Evidence does not do that.

3. *Pro Tanto* Reasons

Besides perfect reasons, there must be reasons in another normative sense, because we often say some fact X is a reason for you to Φ , when it is not the case that you ought to Φ . In these cases, X evidently does not explain the fact that you ought to Φ , since there is no such fact. So X is evidently not a perfect reason. A reason in this second sense is often called a ‘*pro tanto* reason’. I shall now set out to describe and ultimately define a *pro tanto* reason.[2] In this section, ‘reason’ unqualified always refers to a *pro tanto* reason.

The idea of a *pro tanto* reason arises when the explanation of an ought fact takes a particular form. This form is governed by a mechanical analogy. *Pro tanto* reasons are said to have a ‘strength’ or ‘weight’, and these metaphorical terms signal an analogy with mechanical weighing.

The mechanical analogue is this standard explanation of why a pair of scales tips to the left, when it does: the objects in the left-hand pan of the scales have a total weight greater than the total weight of the objects in the right-hand pan. Each object in a pan is associated with a number called its weight. The numbers associated with the objects in the left-hand pan add up to more than the numbers associated with the objects in the right-hand pan. That is why the scales tip to the left.

Suppose you ought to Φ . An explanation strictly analogous to mechanical weighing would be this. There are reasons for you to Φ and reasons for you not to Φ . Each reason is associated with a number that represents

⁶ Joseph Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms* (London: Hutchinson, 1975; reissued by Princeton University Press, 1990; repr. Oxford University Press, 1999), 187.

its weight. The numbers associated with the reasons to Φ add up to more than the numbers associated with the reasons not to Φ . That is why you ought to Φ .

Such a strictly analogous explanation rarely seems appropriate. For one thing, it often seems inappropriate to associate a reason with anything so precise as a number that represents its weight. Secondly, although we can aggregate the weights of several reasons, to aggregate them simply by adding up also often seems inappropriate. So-called organic interactions between reasons often mean that their aggregate effect differs from the total of their weights.

Still, when the fact that you ought to Φ is explained by *pro tanto* reasons, the explanation retains central elements of the mechanical analogy. It includes one or more reasons for you to Φ , and it may also include reasons for you not to Φ . These reasons are analogous to the objects in the left-hand and right-hand pans of the scales. Each reason is associated with a metaphorical weight. This weight need not be anything so precise as a number; it may be an entity of some vaguer sort. The reasons for you to Φ and those for you not to Φ are aggregated or weighed together in some way. The aggregate is some function of the weights of the individual reasons. The function may not be simply additive, as it is in the mechanical case. It may be a complicated function, and the specific nature of the reasons may influence it. Finally, the aggregate comes out in favour of your Φ -ing, and that is why you ought to Φ .

When an explanation of why you ought to Φ takes this form, I shall call it a 'weighing explanation'. The idea of a *pro tanto* reason arises in the context of a weighing explanation.

I have identified a weighing explanation by an analogy with mechanics, and the analogy is not very tight. It is not tight enough to determine a sharp boundary between weighing explanations and others. Still, I can identify some features that are essential to weighing explanations. They will be enough to allow me later to give examples of explanations that are definitely not of this sort.

Here are some essential features of a weighing explanation of why you ought to Φ . The explanation must include one or more facts that it identifies as *pro tanto* reasons, either for you to Φ or for you not to Φ . Each of these reasons must be associated with something that is identified as its 'weight'. The reasons and their weights play a characteristic role in the explanation. The role is that the weights of all the reasons are

aggregated in some way, and the aggregate determines whether or not you ought to Φ .

Any weighing explanation of why you ought to Φ must include at least one *pro tanto* reason for you to Φ . This reason must have a weight. But sometimes the explanation will include no other reason—in particular, no reason for you not to Φ . In that case, you ought to Φ , whatever the weight of the reason for you to Φ . But if that is so, how does the weight of this reason play any role in the explanation? It plays a role counterfactually. If there *were* other reasons for you to Φ or not to Φ , and this reason still held and had the same weight, its weight would participate in determining whether or not you ought to Φ . This would only be so if, were the contrary reasons weighty enough, it would be the case that you ought not to Φ . So a characteristic of any *pro tanto* reason is that it is possible for it to be outweighed. Indeed, this is what the term '*pro tanto*' implies.

Definition

I am now in a position to define a *pro tanto* reason. I have described the characteristic role that *pro tanto* reasons play in an explanation of why you ought to Φ : each has a weight, and the fact that you ought to Φ is explained by the fact that the reasons for you to Φ outweigh the reasons for you not to Φ according to an aggregating function. A *pro tanto* reason is defined as a fact that plays this characteristic role in a weighing explanation.

However, I need to define more specifically a *pro tanto* reason for you to Φ , and this calls for some more detail. Suppose you ought to Φ and this fact has a weighing explanation. In the explanation, the reasons for you to Φ play one role, and the reasons for you not to Φ play another. Let us call these respectively the 'for- Φ role' and the 'against- Φ role'.

Suppose alternatively that you ought not to Φ , and this fact has a weighing explanation. In this explanation, the reasons for you to Φ play the against-not- Φ role and the reasons for you not to Φ play the for-not- Φ role, as I have just defined these roles. Let us rename these roles respectively the 'for- $\bar{\Phi}$ role' and the 'against- $\bar{\Phi}$ role' in this explanation.

Sometimes it is not the case that you ought to Φ , and also not the case that you ought not to Φ . Various explanations might account for this conjunctive normative fact. For example, it may be that your Φ -ing has no normative significance. But on some occasions the conjunctive fact has a weighing explanation. It would take this form: there are reasons for you to

Φ and reasons for you not to Φ , each having a weight, and the reasons on neither side outweigh those on the other. This could be because the reasons exactly balance. More often it will be because the weights of the reasons are not numbers but some vaguer entity that does not permit precise comparison of weights, and in the particular case neither side outweighs the other. In this sort of case, the reasons are often said to be ‘incommensurate’.

In a weighing explanation of why it is not the case that you ought to Φ and not the case that you ought not to Φ , the reasons for you to Φ and those for you not to Φ play opposite but symmetrical roles. Let us once more call them the ‘for- Φ role’ and the ‘against- Φ role’ respectively.

Now we have enough roles. My definition is this: a *pro tanto* reason for you to Φ is a fact that plays the for- Φ role in a weighing explanation of why you ought to Φ , or in a weighing explanation of why you ought not to Φ , or in a weighing explanation of why it is not the case that you ought to Φ and not the case that you ought not to Φ .

Three objections

This definition implies that, when the reasons for you to Φ outweigh the reasons for you not to Φ , then you ought to Φ . But several people have told me this is not necessarily so. I shall review three of their objections.

The first is Dancy’s, presented in his ‘Enticing Reasons’. According to Dancy, the reasons for you to Φ may fall into two classes: enticing reasons and others. The others are ‘peremptory’, whereas the enticing reasons merely make Φ -ing attractive. Suppose there are no non-enticing reasons either for you to Φ or for you not to Φ , but there is an enticing reason for you to Φ . Then, taking all the reasons together, the reasons for you to Φ outweigh those for you not to Φ . But Dancy thinks it is not the case that you ought to Φ , since what counts in favour of your Φ -ing is only an enticing reason. He thinks enticing reasons do not lead to oughts.

In his paper, Dancy reports my response correctly. I think you ought indeed to Φ . I think enticing reasons lead to oughts. As I said in section 1, I do not treat ‘ought’ as a heavyweight word. I recently advised a guest that he ought to try a mangosteen, on the grounds that mangosteens taste delicious. That they taste delicious would have to count for Dancy as an enticing reason. Nevertheless, I believe I spoke correctly.

I did not think my guest was obliged to try a mangosteen; ‘obliged’ is more heavyweight. I did think he ought to try one, but I simultaneously thought it would be permissible for him not to. Dancy generously points out that ‘permissible’ can be used in a way that makes these thoughts consistent. I am happy to adopt this usage.

The second objection was put to me separately by David McNaughton and Michael Smith. Sometimes the reasons for you to Φ outweigh those for you not to Φ , but it is not the case that you ought to Φ , because Φ -ing would be very demanding—it would be supererogatory. So they said. But I think that, if the reasons for you to Φ outweigh those for you not to Φ , then indeed you ought to Φ . If Φ -ing is supererogatory, then you are not obliged to Φ . Also, it is permissible for you not to. One more, this is to use ‘permissible’ in the sense licensed by Dancy.

Those two objections do not require me to adjust my definition of a *pro tanto* reason, but the third one does. This one came from Seana Shiffrin. Sometimes you ought to Φ , and you have a *pro tanto* reason either to Φ or not to Φ , but this reason plays no role in the explanation of why you ought to Φ because the explanation is not a weighing one. It might be a simple deontic principle, say. In a case like this, your *pro tanto* reason does not fit my definition.

Cases like this will occur when a simple deontic principle operates as a side constraint—when it specifies conditions that are sufficient for determining that you ought to Φ , but not necessary. Here is an example. Suppose you (a president) ought not to invade another nation, and this is because you have no authority from the UN and a simple deontic principle says you ought not to invade a nation without authority from the UN. This explanation is not a weighing one. Nevertheless, you might also have a *pro tanto* reason not to invade—for instance that doing so would kill thousands of people. This reason plays no role in explaining why you ought not to invade.

However, *pro tanto* reasons of Shiffrin’s sort do play a role in a *potential* weighing explanation. They play a role in an explanation that would exist if the other, non-weighing explanation of why you ought to Φ were cancelled somehow. In the example, if, counterfactually, you had authority from the UN, then the fact that invading would kill thousands of people would play a role in a weighing explanation of why you ought not to invade, if you ought not, or of why you ought to invade, if you ought.

Accordingly, I need to adjust my definition by including potential weighing explanations as well as actual ones. I get: a *pro tanto* reason for

you to Φ is a fact that plays the for- Φ role in a potential or actual weighing explanation of why you ought to Φ , or in a potential or actual weighing explanation of why you ought not to Φ , or in a potential or actual weighing explanation of why it is not the case that you ought to Φ and not the case that you ought not to Φ .

Counting in favour

‘The reasons for an action are considerations which count in favour of that action.’⁷ These are Raz’s words, but the remark is a commonplace.⁸ My definition of a *pro tanto* reason is a version of it, tightened up enough to make it a genuine definition. The definition specifies just what counting in favour of amounts to. To count in favour of Φ is to play a particular role in an explanation of why you ought to Φ . Counting in favour of is sometimes thought to be the basic normative notion.⁹ But it cannot be, because it is complex. It incorporates the two elements of normativity and explanation. The notion of a reason has the same complexity.

I defined a *pro tanto* reason for you to Φ in terms of: first, the concepts of ought and explanation; second, the various concepts needed to describe a weighing explanation, such as ‘aggregation’; and third, the distinction between the for- Φ role and the against- Φ role in a weighing explanation.

Do not overestimate the importance of this distinction in my definition. I defined a *pro tanto* reason without it, as any fact that plays the characteristic role of a reason in a weighing explanation. I needed the distinction only to separate a *pro tanto* reason to Φ from a *pro tanto* reason not to Φ . A weighing explanation allocates two symmetrical roles to reasons. The distinction is needed to pick out one of these roles rather than the other.¹⁰ In the same way, the distinction between left and right is not needed to understand the idea of a weight, but it would be needed to pick out the weights in the left-hand pan of a pair of scales, rather than those in the right-hand one.

⁷ Ibid. 186.

⁸ Another example is in T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 17.

⁹ For instance in Jonathan Dancy, *Ethics without Principles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), ch. 2.

¹⁰ Adrian Moore and Timothy Williamson pointed out to me that I need a way of picking out these separate roles.

Perfect and *pro tanto* reasons

Often, a *pro tanto* reason for you to Φ by itself constitutes an explanation of why you ought to Φ . If so, it is also a perfect reason for you to Φ . Suppose you ought to take an umbrella because it is raining. Then the fact it is raining explains why you ought to take an umbrella; it is a perfect reason for you to take one. However, no doubt there is also a fuller, weighing explanation of why you ought to take an umbrella. In that explanation, the fact it is raining would figure as a reason that outweighs contrary reasons. It is therefore a *pro tanto* reason too.

4. How Prevalent are *Pro Tanto* Reasons?

I think that, when philosophers speak of reasons, they are most often thinking of *pro tanto* reasons. For example, Raz says: ‘Reasons have the dimension of strength.’¹¹ At that point he must have been thinking of *pro tanto* reasons, because this is true only of them. Only *pro tanto* reasons can participate in a weighing explanation, so only they have weight or strength. The idea of perfect reasons exists only because of the irresistible slide from ‘the reason why you ought to Φ ’ to ‘the reason for you to Φ ’. It is a pity the slide is irresistible, because having two senses of ‘a reason’ complicates the discussion of reasons. But since it is irresistible, we have to put up with the complication and be alert to it. Still, I believe that most philosophers, when they think of reasons, generally think of *pro tanto* ones.

How prevalent are *pro tanto* reasons in the normative domain? How common are they in explanations of what we ought to do, think, want, and so on? They figure only in weighing explanations, so their prevalence depends on the prevalence of weighing explanations. There is a case for thinking that every ought fact has a weighing explanation. I call this view ‘protantism’. In this section, I shall argue that protantism is questionable. I shall also argue that, even if every ought fact does have a weighing explanation, many ought facts also have more significant explanations that are not weighing ones.

Here is a putative counterexample to protantism—a putative example of an ought fact that has no weighing explanation. You ought not to believe both that it is Sunday and that it is Wednesday. A plausible explanation of

¹¹ Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms*, 25.

why not is that ‘It is Sunday’ and ‘It is Wednesday’ are contrary propositions, and you ought never to believe both a proposition and a contrary proposition. This is not a weighing explanation. Neither of the facts included in it has a weight that plays any part in the explanation, and the explanation does not involve aggregating weights.

You might doubt this is a genuine explanation of why you ought not to believe both that it is Sunday and that it is Wednesday. You might doubt the normative principle it calls on: that you ought never to believe both a proposition and a contrary proposition. Suppose the only way a nuclear war can be averted is by your believing two contrary propositions. You might doubt that, in those circumstances, you ought not to believe both.

Some philosophers—call them ‘evidentialists’—think that what you ought to believe is determined only by considerations that are directly connected with the truth of what you believe, so any benefit that may arise from your beliefs is irrelevant. These philosophers will think that, indeed, you ought never to have contrary beliefs. (They may think you ought sometimes to bring it about that you have contrary beliefs, but they think that is a different matter.¹²) So they will think my example of a fact that has no weighing explanation is genuine. They will reject protantism.

But other philosophers—call them ‘pragmatists’—take the opposite view. They think you ought to have contrary beliefs if having them will avert a nuclear war. At least, in those circumstances they think it is not the case that you ought not to have contrary beliefs. They disagree with the normative principle contained in my putative explanation. They accept only a defeasible or conditional version of it. According to them, a correct principle might be: you ought never to believe both a proposition and a contrary proposition unless it would be extremely beneficial to do so.

Pragmatism does not immediately imply protantism, because even according to pragmatism, my ought fact has a non-weighing explanation. Suppose we grant pragmatists that the unconditional principle is false. I can easily reformulate my putative explanation to use the conditional principle instead. I am assuming circumstances are normal, so it is not extremely beneficial for you to have contrary beliefs. In these normal circumstances, you ought not to believe both that it is Sunday and that it

¹² See Derek Parfit, ‘Rationality and Reasons’, in Dan Egonsson, Jonas Josefsson, Björn Petersson, and Toni Ronnow-Rasmussen (eds.), *Exploring Practical Philosophy: From Action to Values*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 17–39.

is Wednesday. The reformulated explanation of this ought fact is as follows. 'It is Sunday' and 'It is Wednesday' are two contrary propositions. You ought not to believe both a proposition and a contrary proposition unless it would be extremely beneficial to do so. But it would not be extremely beneficial to do so. So you ought not to believe both these propositions.

Pragmatists will think this is a correct explanation. But it is not a weighing explanation. None of the three facts included in it has a weight that plays a part in the explanation, and the explanation does not involve aggregating weights. So my ought fact still has a non-weighing explanation, even given pragmatism.

Nevertheless, for this example protantism is very likely to follow from pragmatism. Protantists think every ought fact has a weighing explanation; they need not deny that ought facts may also have non-weighing explanations. Granted pragmatism, it seems very likely that my particular ought fact has a weighing explanation, which would underlie the non-weighing explanation I have given. This weighing explanation would explain the conditional form of the normative principle, and it would go like this. When two propositions are contraries, there is a *pro tanto* reason for you not to believe both of them, stemming from the logical error in doing so. There may also be *pro tanto* reasons for you to believe both, stemming from benefits that will arise from doing so. But unless these benefits are extremely large, the *pro tanto* reason for you not to believe both outweighs the *pro tanto* reason for you to believe both, so you ought not to believe both. Therefore, in the normal circumstances you are actually in, you ought not to believe both.

I think a pragmatist should accept this weighing explanation. Take an extreme case where it is extremely beneficial for you to believe two contrary propositions. In that case, a pragmatist thinks it is not the case that you ought not to believe them both. Even so, she should surely think the fact that the propositions are contraries is a reason not to believe them both. She should think this reason exists, although it does not outweigh the great benefit of believing both. So she should think this reason is a *pro tanto* reason, and there is a weighing explanation in this extreme case. She should think this same reason exists in the normal case, too. In the normal case it outweighs other reasons, though it would not outweigh them if the case were extreme. So the explanation is a weighing one in the normal case too, and the reason in that case too is *pro tanto*.

I think, therefore, that a pragmatist should be a protantist for this example. On the other hand, the example shows that an evidentialist must deny protantism. So the issue of evidentialism versus pragmatism is crucial for the truth of protantism. But I am sorry to say that this issue is too big for this paper. For that reason, I say only that protantism is questionable. My evidence is that several authors have denied pragmatism, at least by implication. Several authors assert that, whatever benefit might come from your having particular beliefs, that benefit cannot constitute a reason for you to have those beliefs.¹³

Here is a second putative counterexample to protantism. Suppose you ought to pay £12,345 in income tax for 2002. A putative explanation of this fact is that £12,345 is what the tax laws say you owe, and you ought always to pay what the tax laws say you owe. A more detailed explanation will spell out the details of your tax calculation. It will contain a mass of complicated conditions and calculations. It will include complex conditional clauses, necessary and sufficient conditions, necessary conditions for other conditions to be sufficient, and so on. None of the facts included in this mass will have a weight that participates in any sort of aggregation. So this seems to be a normative fact that does not have a weighing explanation.

However, my putative explanation is certainly incorrect as it stands. It depends on the normative principle that you ought always to pay what the tax laws say you owe, and this is certainly incorrect. The analogue of pragmatism is certainly true for this example. If great good could be done by your disobeying the tax laws, it is not the case that you ought to obey them. A correct statement of the principle would certainly contain some condition. It might be: you ought to pay what the tax laws say you owe unless great good would result from your not paying it.

I could reformulate the explanation of why you ought to pay £12,345 in income tax, now using the conditional principle. The reformulated explanation is this: the tax laws say you owe £12,345; you ought to pay what the tax laws say you owe, unless great good would result from your not paying it; but great good would not result from your not paying it; so you ought to pay it. This is a non-weighing explanation, and it is plausibly a correct one.

¹³ For example, *ibid.*; Peter Railton, 'Truth, Reason, and the Regulation of Belief', *Philosophical Issues* 5 (1994), 71–93; Jonathan Adler, *Belief's Own Ethics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002); Louis Pojman, 'Believing and Willing', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 15 (1985), 37–56. I thank Andrew Reisner for this list, and for urging on me the merits of pragmatism.

However, as before, a weighing explanation surely underlies it. The weighing explanation will explain the conditional normative principle that the non-weighing explanation depends on. It goes like this. The law constitutes a *pro tanto* reason for paying your taxes. There may also be *pro tanto* reasons against paying them, given by the benefits of not doing so. You ought to pay them if the *pro tanto* reason for paying outweighs the *pro tanto* reasons against paying.

It seems to me that the weighing explanation is more clearly correct in this example than in my previous example. So I think this example is unsuccessful as a counterexample to protantism. I mention it because I want to draw a different lesson from it.

We are looking for the explanation of why you ought to pay £12,345 in income tax. The weighing explanation I have given is unlikely to interest us in practice. Generally in practice, we take it for granted that you ought to pay your taxes, and we are interested in why it is £12,345 that you ought to pay. This calls for an explanation consisting of the mass of complicated conditions and calculations that I mentioned. This mass does not constitute a weighing explanation, and it includes nothing resembling a *pro tanto* reason for or against paying £12,345 in income tax. For example, somewhere in the explanation is the fact that you bought a car for £20,990 in August 2001. Your tax liability is reduced by some fraction of the car's cost, calculated in a complicated way, provided you use it in your business more than some specified amount. The fact that you bought this car is not a *pro tanto* reason either to pay £12,345 in tax or not to pay £12,354 in tax.

So even if protantism is true and every ought fact has a weighing explanation, the interesting explanation of an ought fact may include many facts that are not *pro tanto* reasons, and none that are *pro tanto* reasons. In general, we should recognize that explanations of ought facts take all sorts of forms. Explanations of other facts take all sorts of forms; weighing explanations are rare in mechanics, for instance. It would be a prejudice to expect normative explanations always to take a weighing form, and to consist of *pro tanto* reasons.

I think it is widely recognized that the explanations of ought facts are often not weighing ones. One of Raz's contributions has been to show how varied the explanations of ought facts can be. One of his examples is cancelling. He points out that a reason for you to Φ may be cancelled by some consideration that is not a reason either for you to Φ or for you not to Φ .¹⁴

¹⁴ Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms*, 27.

He says that if you have promised to meet a friend at Carfax, that would be a reason to go to Carfax, but this reason is cancelled if your friend releases you from the promise. The fact that your friend releases you from the promise is neither a reason to go to Carfax, nor a reason not to. So this is not a case of one reason's weighing against another.

Exclusionary reasons are another of Raz's examples. Raz thinks the law is one source of exclusionary reasons. In so far as the law gives you a reason to do what it tells you to do, it also gives you an exclusionary reason, which is a reason not to act on particular contrary reasons, such as benefit to yourself.¹⁵ The contrary reasons are genuine reasons, Raz thinks, but they do not weigh against the law's reason. So in a case where you ought to keep the law, the explanation of why you ought to keep it is not simply that the reason to keep the law outweighs opposing reasons. It is more complicated than that; it involves the exclusion of other reasons.

Scanlon also draws attention to the variety of explanation of ought facts.¹⁶ He recognizes there are many sorts of explanation of why you ought to Φ besides weighing ones. However, Scanlon seems to assume nevertheless that the facts included in these explanations will be reasons. They will not be reasons for you to Φ or not to Φ , but reasons for something else. For example, the explanation may include a reason, X , for not taking some other fact, Y , as a reason for you to Φ .¹⁷ I think Scanlon takes X to be a *pro tanto* reason.

Raz recognizes that explanations may include facts that are not reasons. But nevertheless, like Scanlon, he concentrates very much on reasons. When he emphasizes the complexity of normative explanations, he concentrates particularly on exclusionary reasons.¹⁸ I believe he takes exclusionary reasons to be *pro tanto*.

But once we have noticed the great variety of explanations of ought facts, that should diminish our interest in *pro tanto* reasons. We should investigate all sorts of explanation, and not concentrate only on those that contain *pro tanto* reasons.

¹⁵ Ibid., particularly 73–6. See also 185–6.

¹⁶ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 51–3.

¹⁷ Ibid. 51.

¹⁸ Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms*, 35–48 and 178–99.

5. Reasons and Reasoning

I now come to two popular views that are inconsistent with my account of the normative meaning of 'a reason'. Each uses 'a reason' normatively, but apparently in a sense that differs from the two I have described. We could draw the conclusion that each correctly uses 'a reason' in a further normative sense. But, as I shall explain, I think we do better to draw the conclusion that each view is incorrect.

The first is the view, encapsulated, that reasoning is concerned with reasons: that it is a process of discovering reasons. For theoretical reasoning, it is more precisely the view that, when you reason correctly, your reasoning brings you to have a belief there is a reason for you to have. Take a simple example of correct reasoning. You say to yourself, 'The world was made in six days, so it was made in less than a week.' You start with a belief that the world was made in six days, and by reasoning end up with a new belief that it was made in less than a week. According to the view I have in mind, the fact that you believe the world was made in six days is a reason for you to believe it was made in less than a week.

Applied to practical reasoning, the view is that correct reasoning brings you to have an intention there is a reason for you to have. I think the view is mistaken for both theoretical and practical reasoning, but in this paper I shall concentrate on theoretical reasoning only. I shall examine the view that the fact you believe a proposition is a reason for you to believe its obvious consequences. Briefly, I call this the view that beliefs are reasons. I shall argue against it.

Let us first try applying my two definitions of a reason. Each gives us a version of the view that beliefs are reasons. First, there is the view that beliefs are perfect reasons. My example shows this is false. Suppose you believe the world was made in six days. Then if beliefs were perfect reasons, there would be a perfect reason for you to believe the world was made in less than a week. That is to say, there would be an explanation of why you ought to believe the world was made in less than a week. It would follow that you ought to have this belief. But this is false. The evidence is such that you ought not to have it; certainly it is not the case that you ought to have it.

The second version is the view that beliefs are *pro tanto* reasons. This is not so quickly shown to be false, but we should reject it none the less. There are two objections to it.

The first is just that this view is implausible. There are perhaps various pieces of evidence for the proposition that the world was made in less than a week, and certainly there are many pieces of evidence against it. It is plausible that these pieces of evidence constitute *pro tanto* reasons for believing it and against believing it. There may also be some other *pro tanto* reasons for or against; perhaps you find it reassuring to believe it, and perhaps this is a reason for believing it. But now suppose you believe, against the balance of evidence, that the world was made in six days. How could this belief of yours add to the reasons there are for believing the world was made in less than a week? How could your believing something create in this way a new reason for belief? It would be bootstrapping a new *pro tanto* reason into existence by means of your beliefs. It is implausible that you can do it. Let us call this the 'bootstrapping objection' to the view that beliefs are *pro tanto* reasons.

I can reinforce it by varying the example. The proposition that the world was made in six days is itself an obvious inference from the proposition that the world was made in six days. So the view that beliefs are *pro tanto* reasons implies that believing the world was made in six days is a *pro tanto* reason to believe the world was made in six days. That would be truly implausible bootstrapping.

The second objection is that this view does not explain an important normative connection between believing the world was made in six days and believing the world was made in less than a week. Suppose you believe the world was made in six days, and you do not believe it was made in less than a week. Whatever evidence you may have one way or another, your beliefs are definitely not as they ought to be. This is just because the proposition that the world was made in less than a week follows obviously from the proposition that it was made in six days.

But the view that beliefs are *pro tanto* reasons does not explain why your beliefs are definitely not as they ought to be. So far as this view is concerned, they might be entirely as they ought to be. Your belief that the world was made in six days gives you a *pro tanto* reason to believe it was made in less than a week, but this *pro tanto* reason might be outweighed by a stronger *pro tanto* reason not to believe it was made in less than a week.

On the other hand, a good explanation is available of why your beliefs are definitely not as they ought to be. It depends on the general normative principle that you ought to believe the obvious consequences of your beliefs: if q is an obvious consequence of p , you ought (to believe q if you

believe p). The brackets indicate that the condition ‘if you believe p ’ is within the scope of ‘you ought’. To use the expression I introduced in section 1: believing p normatively requires you to believe q . I shall call this the principle that beliefs are normative requirements.

I should add a detail for clarity. The principle is that you ought (to believe q at a particular time if you believe p at that time). It does not connect a belief at one time with a belief at another. If you believe p at one time but not q at that time, then at that time you are not satisfying the principle. You can come to satisfy it either by coming to believe q or by stopping believing p .

This principle accurately explains why, if you believe the world was made in six days, but do not believe it was made in less than a week, your beliefs are definitely not as they ought to be. You ought (to believe the world was made in less than a week if you believe it was made in six days). Since you do not satisfy the condition in the bracket, your beliefs are not as they ought to be.

The principle that beliefs are normative requirements is not subject to the bootstrapping objection. Suppose you believe the world was made in six days. This belief normatively requires you to believe the world was made in less than a week. However, it does not follow that you have a reason to believe the world was made in less than a week. From ‘you believe the world was made in six days’ and ‘you ought (to believe the world was made in less than a week if you believe it was made in six days)’ we cannot derive ‘you ought to believe the world was made in less than a week’ or ‘you have a reason to believe the world was made in less than a week’. So there is no implication that your belief the world was made in six days bootstraps into existence a reason to believe the world was made in less than a week.

In general, from ‘you believe p ’ and ‘you ought (to believe q if you believe p)’, we cannot derive a detached normative conclusion about your believing q . We cannot derive that you ought to believe q or have a reason to believe q . Normative requirements do not permit this sort of detachment.

For these reasons, the principle that beliefs are normative requirements is far superior to the view that beliefs are *pro tanto* reasons. We should reject the latter.

The view that beliefs are *pro tanto* reasons implies that there is a *pro tanto* reason for you (to believe the world was made in less than a week), if you

believe the world was made in six days. The principle that beliefs are normative requirements implies that you ought (to believe the world was made in less than a week, if you believe the world was made in six days). Comparing these statements shows that the view that beliefs are *pro tanto* reasons mistakes a wide-scope ought for a narrow-scope reason. It gets the logical structure wrong, and that is a serious mistake.

Protantism

The fact that q follows obviously from p explains why you ought (to believe q if you believe p). So this fact constitutes a perfect reason for you (to believe q if you believe p). Protantists think that in some circumstances it might be outweighed by contrary reasons, so they think it is a *pro tanto* reason. This appears to be Raz's view when he says: 'That a certain proposition follows from certain premises is, other things being equal, a reason for not believing the premises without believing the conclusion.'¹⁹

Do not mistake Raz's view for the view that beliefs are reasons. The reason has a wide scope. Applied to my example, it is the view that there is a reason for you (to believe the world was made in less than a week if you believe it was made in six days). Even if you believe the world was made in six days, we cannot derive the conclusion that you have a reason to believe it was made in less than a week. A detached normative conclusion cannot be drawn.

Another sort of reason?

I have argued we should reject the view that beliefs are reasons in either of my two normative senses of 'a reason': a perfect reason or a *pro tanto* reason. Does this mean we should recognize a third normative sense? We could define a sense of 'a reason' this way: ' X is a reason for you to Φ ' means that X normatively requires you to Φ . Under this interpretation, the view that beliefs are reasons would be identical to the view that beliefs are normative requirements. Since indeed beliefs are normative requirements, the view that beliefs are reasons would be true under this interpretation.

This would be a disastrous route to follow. To say ' X is a reason for you to Φ ', when X is a fact, invites us to draw the conclusion that there is a

¹⁹ Raz, *Engaging Reason*, 70.

reason for you to Φ . In my example, it invites us to draw the conclusion that there is a reason for you to believe the world was made in less than a week. But this is just the conclusion we must not draw. It is a detached normative conclusion about your believing the world was made in less than a week. A normative requirement does not permit this sort of detachment. So we must not express a normative requirement using a form of words that permits it.

We should recognize it as simply false that beliefs are reasons. That would be a major step towards clarity in the philosophy of normativity. It is vital to maintain the distinction between a reason and a normative requirement, because it is a distinction of logical structure. We should not confuse wide-scope oughts with narrow-scope reasons.

6. Are Oughts Reasons?

Now the second common view that conflicts with my definitions of ‘a reason’. Suppose you ought to Φ . Many authors think the fact that you ought to Φ is a reason for you to Φ . I shall call this the view that oughts are reasons. It is one implication of the remark of Raz’s that I have already criticized in section 2: ‘We can think of [the reasons for an action] as the facts statements of which form the premises of a sound inference to the conclusion that, other things being equal, the agent ought to perform the action.’²⁰ A statement of the fact that you ought to Φ forms the premiss of a sound inference to the conclusion that, other things being equal, you ought to Φ . So according to this remark, the fact that you ought to Φ is a reason for you to Φ .

The view that oughts are reasons is false if ‘a reason’ has the sense of a perfect reason: the fact that you ought to Φ is not an explanation of why you ought to Φ . It is also false if ‘a reason’ has the *pro tanto* sense: the fact that you ought to Φ cannot play any part in explaining why you ought to Φ . So if this view is correct, there must be another normative sense of ‘a reason’. But actually it is not correct.

Various lines of thought can lead to the view that oughts are reasons. One of them starts from the idea that ‘ought’ and ‘a reason’ refer to different areas of normativity. Most commonly, the idea is that ‘ought’

²⁰ Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms*, 187.

refers to morality, whereas ‘a reason’ refers to normativity all things considered. I do agree that the fact that you morally ought to Φ is a reason for you to Φ . It may be a *pro tanto* reason, and in some contexts it may be a perfect reason. So if ‘ought’ in some sense meant ‘morally ought’, the fact that you ought to Φ , in this sense, would indeed be a reason for you to Φ . In section 1, I cast doubt on the idea that there is such a sense of ‘ought’, and I declined to use it even if there is. So this line of thought does not suggest that oughts, in my sense, are reasons.

A second line of thought is this. If you ought to Φ , there is no doubt an explanation of this fact. That is to say, there is a reason in the non-normative sense why you ought to Φ . Consequently, there is a reason for you to Φ , in the normative sense of a perfect reason. So from the fact that you ought to Φ it follows there is a reason for you to Φ , in one sense. However, it does not follow that this fact is itself a reason for you to Φ . This line of thought is mistaken.

A third line of thought starts like this. If you ought to Φ , and you Φ , the explanation of why you Φ may be the fact that you ought to. For example, since you ought to Φ , you may come to believe you ought to Φ through some epistemic process. Then you may Φ because you believe you ought to. If so, and if we use ‘the reason why’ in its non-normative sense equivalent to ‘the explanation of why’, the fact that you ought to Φ is the reason why you Φ .

This by itself does not suggest this fact is a reason for you to Φ in any normative sense. However, it is traditional in the philosophy of action to separate out a particular class of explanations from others. Explanations in this special class are sometimes called ‘rationalizing explanations’, and sometimes ‘explanations by reasons’. They identify some fact as the reason for which you Φ , and not merely the reason why you Φ . If this fact is the reason for which you Φ , it must surely be a reason for you to Φ in some normative sense.

If the fact that you ought to Φ explains why you Φ , the explanation may well be of the rationalizing sort; if so, the fact that you ought to Φ is the reason for which you Φ , so it must be a reason for you to Φ in some normative sense. That is the line of thought.

It is mistaken. It goes through some subtle transitions in English—from the reason why you Φ to the reason for which you Φ to a reason for you to Φ —in order to move from the non-normative to the normative. It is natural to suspect an equivocation along the way, and indeed there is one.

A fact might be the reason for which you Φ without being a reason for you to Φ . That is, a fact might explain in the rationalizing way why you Φ , without being a reason for you to Φ . Suppose you believe the liquid in the glass in front of you is gin. The fact you have this belief might explain in the rationalizing way why you drink the liquid. But the liquid might actually be petrol, and there might be no reason for you to drink it. So there is an error in this line of thought.

It may nevertheless seem plausible in the particular case we are concerned with. This is the case where the reason for which you Φ is supposed to be the fact that you ought to Φ . This fact may seem unlike the fact that you believe the liquid is gin, in an important respect. It seems to justify your Φ -ing, in a way in which the fact that you believe the liquid is gin does not justify your drinking it. Perhaps this adds credibility to the idea that this fact is a reason for you to Φ .

'Justify' is an ambiguous word. To say that some fact X justifies your Φ -ing may mean that X makes it the case that you ought to Φ . But the fact that you ought to Φ does not justify your Φ -ing in this sense. It does not make it the case that you ought to Φ ; it *is* the fact that you ought to Φ .

Alternatively, to say that X justifies your Φ -ing may mean X normatively requires you to Φ . If you believe the world was made in six days, we might say this fact justifies your believing the world was made in less than a week. Now it is plausible that, if you believe you ought to Φ , the fact that you believe this normatively requires you to Φ .²¹ So it is plausible that believing you ought to Φ justifies your Φ -ing, in this sense of 'justifies'. Perhaps this plausible claim, added to the line of thought I described, could in some way support the view that the fact that you ought to Φ is a reason for you to Φ .

Perhaps it explains why some philosophers take this view. But it is not actually a ground for this view—far from it. The plausible claim is that the fact you believe you ought to Φ normatively requires you to Φ . It is not that the fact you ought to Φ is a reason for you to Φ . It is not even that the fact you believe you ought to Φ is a reason for you to Φ . To think it is confuses reasons and normative requirements in the way I have already objected to.

²¹ Actually, I think this is incorrect, but believing you ought to Φ does normatively require you to intend to Φ . I argued for this claim in my 'Normative Practical Reasoning', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, suppl. vol. 75 (2001), 175–93.

Twist the argument how you like, the same conclusion emerges. It is just not the case that oughts are reasons.

7. Summary

A reason is either a perfect reason or a *pro tanto* reason. A perfect reason for you to Φ is a fact that explains why you ought to Φ . A *pro tanto* reason for you to Φ is a fact that plays a characteristic role in a potential or actual weighing explanation of why you ought to Φ , or of why you ought not to Φ , or of why it is not the case that you ought to Φ and not the case that you ought not to Φ . Consequently, the notion of a reason incorporates the two elements of normativity and explanation.

Many ought facts have explanations that are not weighing explanations, and so do not include *pro tanto* reasons.

Besides reasons, the normative world contains features of a different sort, which I call ‘normative requirements’. Normative requirements have a different logical structure from reasons; they are wide-scope oughts. Nevertheless they are often mistaken for reasons. In particular, it is often thought that theoretical reasoning is concerned with reasons to believe and practical reasoning with reasons to intend. This is not so. Reasoning is concerned with satisfying various normative requirements that hold among beliefs and intentions.²²

²² I am particularly grateful to Jonathan Dancy, for a patient correspondence and discussion about reasons over several years. I do not pretend to have adequately addressed all the important points he has made to me. Among the many others who have generously given me useful comments are Maria Alvarez, Robert Audi, Ruth Chang, Robert Frazier, Brad Hooker, Kent Hurtig, Paul Markwick, Adrian Moore, Derek Parfit, Peter Railton, Joseph Raz, Andrew Reisner, Henry Richardson, Raffaele Rodogno, Bart Streumer, Jussi Suikkanen, John Tasioulas, Bernard Williams, and Timothy Williamson.