

# REASONS AND MOTIVATION

Derek Parfit and John Broome

*II—John Broome*

## REASON AND MOTIVATION<sup>1</sup>

Derek Parfit takes an externalist and cognitivist view about normative reasons. I shall explore this view and add some arguments that support it. But I shall also raise a doubt about it at the end.

### I

When we are wondering what to do, how far can reason guide us?

No doubt it can guide us in forming empirical beliefs about the acts we might do: about their nature or their effects. That is one role it can have in guiding our actions. For instance, reason can guide us in forming beliefs about which means are appropriate to our ends. Suppose the hotel is burning and you want to stay alive. Reason, in the form of inductive and deductive reasoning, may guide you to form the belief that the only way to stay alive is to jump into the canal. Once you have formed this belief, you may find you want to jump into the canal, and indeed you may actually jump.

Some philosophers think this role exhausts the contribution reason can make to action. Reason has an influence on what we do only because it can guide our beliefs. Our beliefs in turn affect the desires we have, and hence what we do. Beyond that, reason can do nothing. In particular, though our beliefs affect our desires, reason plays no part in mediating this effect. Reason does not guide our desires, because no desire can be contrary to reason—irrational, that is to say. True, we may call a desire irrational in a derivative way. We might call one of your desires irrational if it results from a belief it is irrational for you to have. In that case, reason may be able to rid you of it by ridding you of the irrational belief. But in

1. I am grateful to Derek Parfit, Peter Schaber, John Skorupski and Stewart Shapiro for very helpful comments and discussion.

this case the irrationality is in the belief and not the desire; reason can influence the belief directly, but the desire only indirectly. Provided it results from no irrational belief, a desire cannot be irrational. For instance, suppose you rationally believe the only way to stay alive is to jump, and you want to stay alive, but suppose the desire that arises in you as a result is not to jump but to remain on the windowsill singing happily. Then this desire is not irrational even derivatively, because it results from no false belief. Reason cannot guide you away from it.

In this theory, the connection between belief and desire is purely causal. Most of us are so constituted that, when we want something, and we believe that some particular act is the only way to get that thing, then we want to do that act. This disposition is one of our natural features, and it has nothing to do with reason. Someone who does not have it is not irrational, and someone who fails to exhibit it on a particular occasion is not irrational on that occasion. Let us call a person 'together' if she has this feature. Togetherness is not a part of rationality.

I shall call this minimalist theory about the role of reason in action 'the Humean theory of reason', and the role it ascribes to reason the 'Humean' role.<sup>2</sup> The Humean theory claims no desire or act is contrary to reason. It follows immediately that no desire or act is required by reason either, because if it was, the opposite desire or act would be contrary to reason. We may fairly say the Humean theory denies there is such a thing as practical reason. Reason's only role in practical matters is the theoretical one of guiding people's empirical beliefs.

The Humean theory of reason is surely implausible. If you want to stay alive, and you believe that jumping is the only way to do so, and the result is that you want to remain on the windowsill and sing, this want is surely irrational. Reason surely tells you at least that.

This thought can be reinforced by realizing that the relation between means and ends is normally much more complicated than it is in the jumping example. Normally we have many ends, which conflict to various degrees. Normally we have many acts to choose

2. Christine Korsgaard (in 'The normativity of instrumental reason', in Garrett Cullity and Berys Gaut (eds), *Ethics and Practical Reason*, Oxford University Press, 1997) and Elijah Millgram (in 'Was Hume a Humean?', *Hume Studies*, 21 (1995), pp. 75–93) report this as Hume's own view.

amongst and normally none of these acts will have perfectly certain results; each may bring about one or more of our ends with various degrees of likelihood. Furthermore, many of our activities interact with the activities of other people, and that adds the complications of strategic planning. How to choose appropriate means to our ends is the subject matter of decision theory and game theory. Game theory suggests that strategic planning is only possible if reason governs our acts as well as our beliefs. Even in nonstrategic situations, once all your relevant empirical beliefs are settled, it is still often a complicated matter to decide what to do. You might think, for instance: 'Given the likelihood of traffic and the penalty for missing the plane, I should leave home by 6.15; even though that means I should load the car the night before, and take the risk of its being broken into.' According to the Humean theory of reason, once you had formed the relevant empirical beliefs, you would have to leave it to your natural constitution, unaided by reason, to form in you a desire to leave at 6.15 and a desire to load the car the night before. But surely we rely on reason to guide us through these complicated problems; our unaided constitution is too unreliable.

How can reason help? An obvious answer in this case is that it can bring you to believe you ought to leave at 6.15, and you ought to load the car the night before. In general, it can bring you to normative beliefs: beliefs about what you ought to want or ought to do. This is a cognitivist answer. I shall pursue it through Sections II, III, IV and V. In Section VI I shall briefly mention a noncognitivist alternative.

## II

If reason is to do what the cognitivist answer suggests, there must be valid patterns of inference that can lead to normative conclusions. I do not mean we must necessarily reason by making formal derivations. But if reason is to bring us to normative beliefs, those beliefs must be justified by valid inferences. What might these patterns of inference be? I have little positive to say about this, but in this section I shall say something negative about one particular attempt to go beyond the Humean theory in this direction.

It can be imperfectly illustrated in the jumping example. You might reason: 'I want to stay alive; the only way for me to stay

alive is to jump; therefore, I ought to want to jump.’ Here you apply to yourself an inference of the pattern:

- (1) *M* wants *X*, and the only way for *M* to get *X* is for her to do *A*. Therefore, *M* ought to want to do *A*.

At first sight this seems valid; its basis is the plausible general principle that a person’s desires ought to be consistent with each other. *A* is not necessarily a means to *X*; it may be *X* itself under a particular description. For instance, writing an article is a way to work, but not a means to work; it is in itself working. Nevertheless, for brevity I shall call (1) ‘naive instrumentalist reasoning’. By ‘instrumentalism’ I mean the view that our desires gives us reasons to pursue their satisfaction. Instrumentalism is one attempt to go beyond the Humean theory of reason.

As it happens, (1) is invalid for one type of reason that I propose to ignore. Even if the premises of (1) are true, *M* may want something else more than she wants *X*, or her dislike of doing *A* may outweigh her desire for *X*, and consequently it may not be true that she ought to want to do *A*. To deal with these problems properly, instrumentalism needs to be expressed using the resources of decision theory.<sup>3</sup> For one thing, it needs to be expressed in terms of preferences—comparative desires—rather than monadic desires. It should not appeal to a principle that a person’s desires ought to be consistent, but to the principle that her preferences ought to be consistent. This requirement of consistency is precisely specified within decision theory. But to state instrumentalism properly in this way would take too much space, so I shall stick with the simple means-end example, and ignore these particular defects. To help avoid them, I intend the wants in (1) to be all-things-considered wants, which cannot be overridden by others.

It will be useful to compare another pattern of inference that also seems valid at first sight:

- (2) *M* believes *P*, and *M* believes  $P \rightarrow Q$ . Therefore, *M* ought to believe *Q*.

3. Jean Hampton (in ‘The failure of expected-utility theory as a theory of reason’, *Economics and Philosophy*, 10 (1994), pp. 195–242) assumes that decision theory is itself an instrumentalist theory, and this is a common assumption. But it is mistaken. Decision theory can help to express instrumentalism accurately because it specifies consistency requirements for rational preferences. But it is consistent with decision theory to add noninstrumentalist requirements too. For instance, we might add the requirement that a person ought to prefer one thing to another if and only if it is better.

This seems a consequence of the plausible general principle that a person ought to believe the immediate consequences of her beliefs.

Both (1) and (2) derive an ought from an is; they draw a normative conclusion from non-normative premises. Presumably that is why Hume rejected (1) as a basis for practical reasoning. And indeed neither (1) nor (2) is valid, despite first appearances. To see (2) must be invalid, think about a case where  $M$  has inconsistent beliefs, as is obviously possible. Suppose she believes all of  $P$ ,  $P \rightarrow Q$ ,  $R$  and  $R \rightarrow \neg Q$ . Then (2) implies she ought to believe  $Q$  and she ought to believe  $\neg Q$ . But this cannot be true, because she ought not to have inconsistent beliefs.

Inference (1) also cannot be valid, because it can lead to inconsistent conclusions when a person has inconsistent desires. This is obvious, but a thoroughly convincing example is hard to produce, because the idea of inconsistent desires cannot be made precise without the resources of decision theory. We should really deal with inconsistent preferences rather than inconsistent desires. But, to stick with the simple example, suppose  $M$  desires both  $X$  and not  $X$ , and these are all-things-considered desires, so they are genuinely inconsistent with one another. Then (1) will imply both that  $M$  ought to want to do  $A$  and that she ought to want not to do  $A$ . These conclusions cannot both true, because  $M$  ought not to have inconsistent desires.

Although (1) and (2) are invalid, there is evidently some truth in the idea that you should have consistent desires and that you should believe the immediate consequences of your beliefs. There must be some way of fixing (1) and (2). One possibility is to make the ought that appears in them in some way relative. If  $M$  believes both  $P$  and  $P \rightarrow Q$ , perhaps she ought, in some way relative to these beliefs, to believe  $Q$ . Similarly the ought in (1) might be made relative to the desire. But a relative ought cannot justifiably guide a person in forming her beliefs and desires. Even if  $M$  ought, in some way relative to her desire for  $X$ , to want to do  $A$ , it remains possible that she ought nonrelatively not to want to do  $A$ . So the relative ought cannot justify her in wanting to do  $A$ .

To be sure, you can only draw inferences from the beliefs you have, so you can at best form your desires on the basis of what you believe you ought to want. This may be different from what you actually ought to want. Still, to be justified in wanting something,

you need to believe you ought nonrelatively to want it. But (1) could only lead you to believe you ought relatively to want it. You could consistently believe this and at the same time believe you ought nonrelatively not to want it. So this belief could not justify you in wanting it.

We could directly block the self-contradictory implications of (1) and (2) by adopting these more sophisticated inference patterns:

- (3) *M* wants *X*, and all *M*'s desires are consistent, and the only way for *M* to get *X* is for her to do *A*. Therefore *M* ought to want to do *A*.
- (4) *M* believes *P* and *M* believes  $P \rightarrow Q$ , and all *M*'s beliefs are consistent. Therefore *M* ought to believe *Q*.

Let us call (3) 'sophisticated instrumentalist reasoning'. But (3) and (4) are subject to a second, equally fatal, objection. In (4), substitute '*P*' for '*Q*'. We can take it for granted that *M* believes the tautology  $P \rightarrow P$ . So (4) implies that, if *M* believes *P*, and all her beliefs are consistent, it follows she ought to believe *P*. But it plainly does not follow. Similarly, (3) has a plainly false implication. Take a case where *X*, the thing *M* wants, is to do something, *B* (like stay alive). Then we can replace '*X*' in (3) with 'to do *B*'. Let us also substitute '*B*' for '*A*'. We get

- (5) *M* wants to do *B*, and all *M*'s desires are consistent, and the only way for *M* to do *B* is for her to do *B*. Therefore *M* ought to want to do *B*.

It is obviously true that the only way for *M* to do *B* is for her to do *B*. So we get that, if *M* wants to do *B*, and all her desires are consistent, it follows she ought to want to do *B*. This is plainly false. Just because you want something (and have consistent desires) it does not follow you ought to want it. Sophisticated instrumentalism is little better than the naive sort.

Schema (5) could not be obtained from (3) if we required *A* in (3) to be strictly a means to *X*. But that would not be enough to rescue (3). Wanting *X* does not give you a reason to want *A* when *A* is actually *X* itself under a particular description. *A fortiori*, it does not give you a reason to want *A* when *A* is a mere means to *X*. If wanting *X* cannot give you a reason to want an act that is *X* itself, it cannot give you a reason to want an act that is more remote

from  $X$ . Similarly, I have been doing instrumentalism no injustice by treating it as a view about what you ought to want rather than what you ought to do. If instrumentalist reasoning cannot validly conclude you ought to want to do an act, *a fortiori* it cannot validly conclude you ought to do the act. Instrumentalism is just false: wanting something is not a reason to want it, and consequently not a reason to try and get it.

Is there an alternative pattern of inference that could lead you to the conclusion that you ought to want to do some act? Consider:

- (6)  $M$  ought to want  $X$ , and the only way for  $M$  to get  $X$  is for her to do  $A$ . Therefore,  $M$  ought to want to do  $A$ .

This is instrumental reasoning, but not instrumentalism as I defined it. It has the same decision-theoretic problems I mentioned earlier over conflicting ends. But setting those aside, (6) is surely valid. However, it is useless if its premise that  $M$  ought to want  $X$  cannot ever be true. According to the Humean theory of reason, it cannot be, because no want can be required by reason. Instrumentalism tries to escape the Humean theory by claiming that  $M$  ought to want  $X$  if  $X$  is the only way of getting something  $M$  wants—for instance, you ought to want to stay alive if you want to see your friends again. But I have denied instrumentalism.

So I have so far made no positive progress towards extending the role of reason beyond the Humean one. To make progress in this direction, I would need to show how, for some  $X$ , it could be true that you ought to want  $X$ . That may be possible. For instance, perhaps I could show that you ought to want to stay alive. Perhaps it is a general principle of reason that you ought to want what is good, and perhaps it could be shown that your staying alive is good. But I shall not try and make this argument here. I shall now turn round and work forwards to what follows the conclusion of our reasoning, rather than backwards to what grounds it. For the sake of argument, I shall simply assume that (6) or some other pattern of reasoning can justify the conclusion that you ought to want to jump. Without this, the cognitivist theory I am exploring would not be possible.

Having got this far, we need not hesitate to go further and conclude you ought actually to jump. To be sure, there are unusual situations where you ought to want to do something (all things considered) without its being the case that you ought to do it. These

will be situations where the reason for wanting is a property of the want itself and not of the act. (Parfit calls this a state-based reason rather than an object-based one.) For instance, a millionaire might offer you a large prize for wanting to drink a toxic drink, whether or not you actually drink it.<sup>4</sup> But in (6) the reason for wanting to do *A* is a property of *X*, which *M* will get only if she actually does *A*. So (6) is not relevant to the unusual situations, and we can conclude *M* ought to do *A*.

### III

So let us now assume that in one way or another reason can lead us to a conclusion about what we ought to do. If this is so, it means reason goes far beyond its Humean role. It guides us, not merely to beliefs in empirical propositions, but to beliefs in normative propositions. In this, however, it is still playing a role that could fairly be called theoretical rather than practical. It works by the usual processes of inductive and deductive reasoning, and perhaps by other reasoning processes too, to carry us from beliefs in some propositions to beliefs in others. This reasoning would be exactly the same whether conducted in the first person or the third person. We cannot plausibly call third-person reasoning—which arrives, for instance, at the conclusion that someone else ought to jump into the canal—truly practical, even though its conclusion is normative. So if this was all there was to it, reason would not yet have found a truly practical role. I shall continue to call reasoning of this type ‘theoretical’, even when it is reasoning about normative propositions.

But there is more. In the Humean theory, reason, having guided you by some process of reasoning to believe that jumping is the only way to stay alive, guides you no further. By contrast, we are now supposing reason guides you by some process of reasoning to believe the normative proposition that you ought to jump. To put it another way, you believe reason requires you to jump. Normative propositions have the special nature that they are about what reason requires. Consequently, theoretical reasoning about normative propositions has as its subject matter part of reason itself. So when the theoretical reasoning leaves off, we have not finished with reason. We are left with a proposition about what reason requires:

4. This example is inspired by Gregory Kavka’s in ‘The toxin puzzle’, *Analysis*, 43 (1983), pp. 33–6.



in your case, with the proposition that reason requires you to jump—you are irrational if you do not. Reason plays a double role, then. By the ordinary processes of theoretical reasoning it guides you to a belief, and then it directs you how to act.

We might be inclined to call reason in the second role practical, but for it to be truly practical we need more. Imagine people who have normative beliefs—they believe they ought to do one thing or another—but who never do what they believe they ought to do because they believe they ought to do it. If one of them happens to do what she believes she ought to do, the explanation is always something other than her belief. We could not say these people are guided by reason in their acts, nor that reason is truly practical for them. So for reason to be truly practical, we must sometimes do what we believe we ought to do because we believe we ought to do it. Our normative beliefs must sometimes explain our acts. This is what Christine Korsgaard calls ‘the internalism requirement’.<sup>5</sup> It is implausible that people *necessarily* do what they believe they ought to do; that would be ‘belief internalism’, and we may happily reject it. But for reason to be practical, it must be *possible* for people to do what they believe they ought to do because they believe they ought to do it.

Actually, for reason to be practical, we need more than this. A normative belief can explain the right act in the wrong way. Your belief that you ought to jump might perversely cause you to sing happily, so that you start to skip about on the windowsill and by accident jump into the canal. In this case, you were not guided by reason. If reason is to be practical, not only must normative beliefs sometimes explain acts, they must sometimes do so in the right way. We must add this ‘right-way’ requirement to the internalism requirement. What is the right way? I shall come to that in Section V.

#### IV

How can the internalism requirement be met? Definitely not by the definition of ‘rational’. If a person fails to do what she believes she ought to do, she is by definition irrational or at least not fully rational; so rational people always do what they believe they ought to do. This explains why rational people do what they believe they

5. *Op. cit.*

ought to do. But it does not explain how, in a rational person, the belief explains the act, which is what the internalism requirement requires. Sometimes a person acts because she believes she ought to. When this happens, the person is acting rationally. But how does it happen at all? How can a normative belief explain an act?

Faced with this question, some authors proceed as follows. They start from some preconceived view about how an act can be explained. This view imposes some constraint on the sorts of things that can explain an act. We are asking how a particular belief can explain an act. This strategy will impose some constraints on the nature of the belief, or it may even lead to the conclusion that the belief itself cannot explain the act. So it may force a reformulation of the question.

An example of this strategy starts from the preconceived view known as the Humean theory of motivation. This theory says an act cannot be explained by a belief alone, but only by a belief together with a desire. Specifically, if a person does *A*, the explanation cannot be just that she believes something, but that she wants something and believes doing *A* is a way for her to get this thing. Conversely, if the person wants something and believes doing *A* is a way for her to get this thing, then, if she does *A*, her desire and belief can constitute an explanation of her act. For instance, if you jump, that can be explained by your desire to stay alive and your belief that jumping is a way to stay alive.

If you ought to jump, let us say you have a ‘complete reason’ to jump. Now, this argument goes, our problem was to understand how your complete reason can explain your jumping. According to the Humean theory of motivation, this reason can only explain your act if it takes a particular form: the form of a desire for something together with a belief that jumping is a way to get this thing. So this argument uses the Humean theory of motivation to put a constraint on the form of a reason. The argument may be used to give some support to instrumentalism. It says that only a desire, together with a belief, can give you a complete reason for jumping. Only a desire, with a belief, can supply a reason.

There is a mistake in this argument. Our problem was not how your complete reason can explain your jumping, but how your belief that you have a complete reason—that you ought to jump—can explain it. The Humean theory of motivation says this belief by

itself cannot explain your act. One Humean response would be to find a desire that can be added to the belief in order to explain the act; I shall explain below that this can indeed be done. But the argument above, as I intended it to be understood, offered a quite different Humean explanation: a desire together with a quite different belief—a desire for something together with a belief that jumping is a way to get it. And the argument claimed that this desire and this different belief together constitute your complete reason for jumping. But if indeed this desire and this different belief do explain your jumping, your belief that you ought to jump plays no part in the explanation. Nor can this desire and this different belief justify you in believing you ought to jump; I showed that in Section II. So this argument gives no place to the belief that you ought to jump. Yet the only role we have so far found for reason, beyond the Humean one, was to bring you to this belief. Starting from the Humean theory of motivation, then, this argument simply takes us back to the Humean theory of reason. All it can say by way of explaining your jumping is this: you are naturally constituted so that, when you want something, and you believe jumping is a way to get it, you come to want to jump, and do so. Reason plays no part in this explanation, except that it no doubt helps bring you to believe that jumping is a way to get what you want. To say the belief and desire together constitute a ‘reason’ to jump is only a courtesy. They bring you to jump without the participation of reason.

Put it this way. Instrumentalism is the view that desires supply reasons for action. The argument I have given supports instrumentalism to the extent of saying that *only* desires (together with beliefs) can supply reasons for action. We know from Section II that instrumentalism is false: desires do not supply reasons for action. So if this argument is sound, there are no reasons for action.<sup>6</sup>

Fortunately it is not sound. There is another way to explain how a normative belief can explain an act. We may suppose it is simply a feature of most people’s psychology that they are disposed to do what they believe they ought to do. Let us call this feature ‘general practical rationality’ or ‘general rationality’. Those of us who do not have it are irrational. Even those who do have it will not always

6. I think this is the correct conclusion to draw if you are persuaded by the argument in Bernard Williams’s ‘Internal and external reasons’, in his *Moral Luck*, Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp. 101–13.

do what they believe they ought to do. Sometimes things will obstruct their general rationality, such as weakness of will or inertia. Sometimes, too, a person will try to do something and fail. But for simplicity I shall concentrate only on acts that the person can do, so this type of failure will not arise. Given that, the obstructions to general rationality will, like general rationality itself, be features of the person's psychology.

Take a particular occasion when you believe you ought to do some act. If you are generally rational and if your general rationality is not obstructed on this occasion, let us say you are 'specifically rational' on this occasion. Specific rationality is another feature of your psychology. If you believe you ought to do some specific act, and if you are specifically rational, you will do the act. Your belief, in combination with your specific rationality, explains your act. This answers our question about how your belief that you ought to do the act explains your doing it. It explains it through a natural feature of your psychology: your specific rationality.

Let us call this the 'natural disposition' account of rational action. It is consistent with the Humean theory of motivation. Specific rationality is a psychological state that disposes you to do what, on a particular occasion, you believe you ought to do. Put differently, it disposes you to do what you believe is a way to do what you ought to do. According to a common functionalist definition of desire, a state that disposes you to do what you believe is a way to do *B* is a desire to do *B*. So specific rationality is nothing other than a desire to do what you ought to do. This desire, together with a belief that some act is a way to do what you ought to do, explains your doing this act. This exactly conforms to the Humean theory of motivation.

The natural disposition account satisfies the internalism requirement: it shows how a normative belief can explain an act. It is also consistent with externalism in Parfit's sense: it allows it to be the case that you ought to do some act without its being the case that, if you went through informed deliberation, you would do it. Informed deliberation would presumably bring you to believe you ought to do this act, but it might not bring you to be specifically rational, so it might not bring you to do it. So Parfit's externalism can satisfy the internalism requirement. Can it satisfy it in the right way?

## V

Does the natural disposition account satisfy the right-way requirement? I shall present a case for saying it does, and a case against, in the form of a dialogue.

**Against.** There must be some way of dividing the right way from the wrong way, but the natural disposition account seems not to have the resources to distinguish them. Think about someone with a strange mental sickness. Various events cause her to become fixated on particular acts, and she sets out to do these acts with mindless determination. Reasoned argument cannot turn her away from them. For example, if she sees a city mentioned on page four of a newspaper, she goes there. She keeps what she calls a 'book of acts'. Whenever she sees a greyhound, she looks up an act at random in her book, and does it. And so on. She does not believe she ought to do these things; she simply wants to do them badly. However, she does sometimes form beliefs about what she ought to do. When she does, this is one of the events that precipitates a fixation. She becomes fixated on what she believes she ought to do, and sets out to do it with the same unreasoning, mindless determination. So this person has a natural disposition to do what she believes she ought to do. Consequently, when she believes she ought to do something, that belief can explain her doing it. She is generally rational according to the definition of general rationality, and when she does what she believes she ought to do, she is specifically rational. The natural disposition account is not in a position to repudiate her claim to rationality. Yet the belief clearly explains the act in the wrong way, because the way it explains it also explains this person's definitely irrational behaviour.

How should we characterize the right way for a normative belief to explain an act? If reason is to be truly practical, the right way should somehow involve reason. By this test, the natural disposition account fails. When a person does what she believes she ought to do, what makes her do so is a feature of her natural psychology. It is not any process involving reason. True, reason leads her to her belief about she ought to do, and we can say reason directs her to do what she believes she ought to do. But what actually explains her doing what she believes she ought to do is a natural disposition to do so, which does not involve reason. The

natural disposition account is externalist in a stronger sense than Parfit's: motivation is external to reason; it comes from a person's natural constitution. We may say this account agrees with Hume that reason is perfectly inert: reason only brings us to *beliefs* about what we ought to do, not to *acts* themselves.

So far as practical reason is concerned, we have not progressed much beyond the Humean theory of reason. Within the Humean theory, I gave the name 'togetherness' to the feature of people's psychology that disposes them to do what they believe will get them something they want. Togetherness is openly conceded to be nothing to do with rationality. We have now called on a feature of people's psychology that disposes them to do what they believe they ought to do. I called that feature 'practical rationality', but it does not in fact involve reason. We seem to have two separate faculties at work. There is reason, which brings us to beliefs about what we ought to do, and in a sense directs us to do what we believe we ought to do. Then there is rationality, a natural feature that causes us to do what we believe we ought to do. Why should this rationality be considered a part of reason?

**For.** But now, in favour of the natural disposition account, we might ask: what more do we want? Reason brings a person to a belief about what she ought to do, and then she sometimes does what she believes she ought to do. We have explained how that happens, and the explanation fits the fact that it happens when she is rational, and not when she is irrational. We call the explanatory disposition 'rationality' because it is what brings her to do what she believes reason requires her to do. Together with the ability to reason, it is part of what makes a person rational in thinking and in acting. To ask that this disposition should itself involve reason is to ask too much. It is to suggest that reason should actually bring a person to act rationally. Of course reason cannot make you act in accordance with reason.

Moreover, there is another way to distinguish the right way from the wrong way. Reason is not *involved* in the right way, but it does *sanction* the right way: we can say you *ought* to have the natural disposition of rationality. This distinguishes the right way from the wrong way. It is not the case that the person with fixations ought to have her peculiar disposition.

This suggestion that you ought to have the disposition of rationality needs to be treated carefully. Let us ask whether, on the natural disposition account, it satisfies the internalism requirement. If you believe you ought to be rational, can that belief explain your being rational? A belief of that sort could certainly explain your being *specifically* rational on some particular occasion. For instance, suppose that today, while cool, you believe you ought to be specifically rational tomorrow, when you will have an emotional decision to make. If you are specifically rational today over this particular belief, you may take steps today to give yourself the specifically rational disposition for the appropriate occasion tomorrow. On the other hand, believing you ought to be *generally* rational could not explain your being generally rational. If the belief was to explain the rationality, it would have to make you rational when you are not. But when you are not, you are not disposed to do what you believe you ought to do. So, even if you believe you ought to become rational, that belief will not dispose you to become rational.

But why should that matter? This ought does not satisfy the internalism requirement, but that does not seem to prevent its being true that you ought to be rational. So this does seem to be a way of distinguishing the right way from the wrong way. We have simply come up against an obvious limit to the power of reason in practical matters. Reason can have no part in explaining why, ultimately, we have a rational disposition.

**Against.** A final response on behalf of the case against the natural disposition account. To ask that reason should be involved in bringing a person to do what she believes she ought to do is *not* asking too much. It is certainly not asking that reason should make a person do what she believes she ought to do; we need not insist that the involvement of reason should be infallible. Nor do we ask that reason should be involved in explaining our rationality. Our complaint is simply that, in the natural disposition account, the role of reason is cut off too early. It is cut off before the real decision making begins.

Still, if this is the only available account of the role of reason, we shall have to be content with it. Is there another?

## VI

At the end of Section I, I made a cognitivist assumption that has determined the direction of my argument up to now. I assumed that if reason is to go beyond its Humean role, it must do so by giving us normative beliefs. Then the question arose: once we have a normative belief, how can reason bring us to act in accordance with it? That has proved difficult to answer satisfactorily. Perhaps this is not surprising. If we start by assigning reason the job of forming beliefs, perhaps it is not surprising if we cannot see how it can go beyond beliefs to acts.

There are processes of reasoning that do not involve normative beliefs. For example, when we come to believe a proposition by theoretical reasoning, we do not normally first come to believe we ought to believe the proposition, and for that reason come to believe it. We go straight to the proposition without forming any normative belief on the way. A more controversial example appears in a case when you have a choice between two different acts *A* and *B*, where each will achieve something of value, but where the values achieved by each are incommensurable. Then it may not be the case that you ought to do *A*, nor that you ought to do *B*. If so, you cannot rationally decide which to do by first forming a belief about which you ought to do. Does this mean reason cannot be involved in your decision, once you know all the relevant empirical facts? We may think a rational faculty is involved. It is sometimes called 'judgement' (though that term is misleading because this faculty judges no fact).

Examples like this suggest practical reasoning perhaps need not involve normative beliefs. Korsgaard<sup>7</sup> reminds us that Kant thought practical reason is concerned directly with the will. It goes directly from willing an end to willing the means. If you will to stay alive, that commits you to willing the means of staying alive, and so to jumping. Your reasoning does not go through the normative belief that you ought to jump, so it does not have to navigate the difficult passage from this normative belief to jumping.

This idea needs to be spelt out, and it faces difficulties of its own. One is to deal with the complexity of real instrumental reasoning that I mentioned in Section I, without the benefit of normative

7. *Op. cit.*



beliefs. But it may be a live noncognitivist rival to the natural disposition account of practical reason.