

Susanne Mantel's *Determined by Reasons*

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Some facts favour us acting in certain ways. Such facts are *normative reasons* – a familiar kind of entity in contemporary normative theory. Sometimes, we act in a way that a given normative reason favours. Cassidy, who has promised to meet her friend for lunch, goes to meet her friend for lunch. She thereby acts as her normative reason: *I promised to meet my friend* favours. But (hopefully) we often do something more demanding: we perform the action our normative reason favours, but where its presence and normative status is operative with respect to our doing it. Let us label this phenomenon ‘acting in response to a normative reason’. Acting as one’s normative reason favours and acting in response to it are different phenomena. Cassidy goes to meet her friend, but she might not do so in response to the reason that she promised – she might go simply because she’s hungry. If she does go in response to the reason that she promised, she is subject to praise for acting as that reason favours. If she acts merely in accordance with it, she is subject to no such praise.

Acting in response to a normative reason is the subject-matter of Susanne Mantel’s excellent new monograph *Determined by Reasons*. Mantel addresses two questions. First: what does acting in response to a normative reason consist in? This is the topic of Part I of the book, in which Mantel spells-out and defends her *Normative Competence Account* by demonstrating its superiority to purely causal accounts (Chs.2–3) and develops it by demonstrating that it has the flexibility to account for both Humean and Kantian modes of normative responsiveness (Ch.4). Second: how should the distinction between normative and motivating reasons fit into our account of responding to normative reasons? This is the topic of Part II, in which Mantel argues that normative and motivating reasons are not *identical* when the agent responds to a normative reason, rather: the latter accurately represent and reliably track the former (Chs.6–8), before concluding with some reflections on how this fits with the Psychologistic tradition (Ch.9).

Mantel argues persuasively for a competence-based account of responding to normative reasons; she provides the most thorough development of that approach currently available; and she offers a very careful and insightful discussion of the well-worn distinction between normative and motivating reasons. Her book is therefore a very welcome addition to the literature on the role of reasons in normative psychology, and is essential reading for any philosopher wishing to investigate the role the dispositional modality can play in this area. In this review, I will confine my exegetical and critical attention to Mantel's Normative Competence Account: §1 provides an outline of it; §2 raises an objection.

1 The Normative Competence Account

When S ϕ s in response to the normative reason that p, this involves, for Mantel, the following elements (pp.14–17):

- (i) S believes that p
- (ii) S is motivated to ϕ
- (iii) S ϕ s.

In order for the agent to count as ϕ -ing in response to the normative reason that p, these three elements need to be related in the right sort of way: (iii) needs to be suitably based on (ii) and (ii) suitably based on (i). Moreover, (i) needs to display the right epistemic credentials (pp.33–38).

Mantel introduces a trio of agential abilities to account for all this: an *executorial competence* which, when manifested by the agent's ϕ -ing, is intended to ensure the right kind of basing between (iii) and (ii); a *volitional competence* which, when manifested by the agent's state of being motivated to ϕ , is intended to ensure the right kind of basing between (ii) and (i); and an *epistemic competence* which, when manifested by S's belief that p, is intended to ensure that the belief has the right epistemic credentials.

Each of these is what Mantel calls a *tracking competence*. Tracking competences have two hallmarks (pp.45-47). First, they are dispositions which function to reliably produce conditions which *match*, in some specified way, certain other conditions. Second, they are triggered either by the condition to be matched or a reliable indicator of it.

The executorial competence which, on Mantel's account, serves to mediate between elements (ii) and (iii) is a tracking competence which functions to reliably produce ac-

tions of a type which match what the agent is motivated to do. The volitional competence which serves to mediate between elements (i) and (ii) is a tracking competence which functions to reliably produce states of being motivated to perform a type of action which is favoured by – and hence counts as matching – the type of normative reason represented by the agent’s belief that p. Finally, the agent’s belief that p is subject to an epistemic tracking competence which functions to reliably produce a belief that p which matches the fact that p.

For Mantel, responding to a normative reason consists in acting in a way that manifests the epistemic, volitional, and executorial competences together – this, in essence, is Mantel’s Normative Competence Account. Importantly, she denies that hers is a Causal Account, for that requires, at minimum, that there is a causal relation running in the direction of (i) to (ii), and another running in the direction of (ii) to (iii), constitutively involved in responding to a normative reason. But since the volitional and executorial competences need be triggered only by conditions which *indicate* the presence of the belief that p and the agent’s motivation to ϕ respectively, and not by those states themselves, positing such causal links is unnecessary (pp.47-53).

2 Indicator Phenomena, Rational Agency, and Causation

I agree with Mantel that we ought to account for responding to reasons in terms of the agent’s abilities. However, I want to raise a worry about cashing out that style of view in terms of tracking competences.

A hallmark of tracking competences is that they can be triggered not by the condition to be tracked, but by some other condition which reliably indicates it. This means that on Mantel’s view, we may classify as cases of responding to the normative reason that p cases in which: (a) the agent’s belief that p is repressed; but (b) the agent has some reliable evidence to think they have it nevertheless. Consider, for example, the following:

Untrustworthy Friend. Cassidy has displayed a tendency to fail to keep her promises. This caused her great shame, which in turn causes her to henceforth repress her belief that she’s promised, whenever she makes one. However, she is reliably informed by her analyst that whenever she has one of the repressed beliefs in question, this causes a twitch in her right eye. One day, she promises to meet her friend for lunch; the belief in question gets repressed; and Cassidy experiences the characteristic twitching. She thereby

comes to know that she has a belief that she promised her friend something, and surmises that she believes she promised to meet her friend for lunch on the grounds that she's noted the lunch-date in her diary. Knowing that she believes she promised to meet her friend, she thereby goes.

Mantel's account implies that we may classify Cassidy as attending lunch in response to the normative reason *that she promised*. But I think there's room to doubt that repressed beliefs which one has sufficient evidence to think one has can play the role of providing the reasons in response to which one acts. That's because there's an intimate connection between ϕ -ing in response to the normative reason that p and being able to *reason* with the normative reason that p – if the normative reason that p is to play the role of moving one to ϕ , it had better be that one has the ability to use that consideration in reasoning to the conclusion to ϕ . And yet, repressed beliefs are precisely not accessible in reasoning.

At minimum, Mantel will have to make the following modification to her view in response to this worry: she'll have to accept that the volitional competence must take as its triggering condition the belief that p, and not a mere indicator of it, so that it is not a tracking competence after all. A similar argument will demonstrate the same thing about the executional competence. But if we make the modifications to Mantel's account just suggested, she loses her motivation for denying that her account is causal.