When Reasons Run Out

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ABSTRACT

Subjectivists about practical normativity hold that an agent's favoring and disfavoring attitudes give rise to practical reasons. On this view, an agent's normative reason to choose vanilla over chocolate ice cream ultimately turns on facts about what appeals to her rather than facts about what her options are like attitude-independently. Objectivists—who ground reasons in the attitude-independent features of the things we aim at—owe us an explanation of why it is rational to choose what we favor, if not simply because favoring is a source of reasons. My aim in this paper is to supply such a story. The proposal is roughly that when an agent cannot base her choices on her judgments about what she has most reason to do, structural rationality extends to her a license to choose something solely on the basis that she favors it, without imbuing favoring with the authority of a normative reason.

Keywords: REASONS, SUBJECTIVISM, NORMATIVITY, VALUE, RATIONALITY, PERMISSIVE CHOICE

1 Introduction

It is agreed on almost all hands that we have reasons for action, but there is a long-running disagreement concerning the source or ground of these reasons. And though hybrid positions are certainly possible, theorists tend to sort themselves into one of two camps.[1] Objectivists maintain that practical reasons derive exclusively or ultimately from facts about the objects of action and choice, and in particular from facts about their objective choiceworthiness or value (Raz 1999; Dancy 2000; Wedgwood 2009; Bond 1983; Parfit 2011; Scanlon 1998; Quinn 1993). On the other hand,

[1] Chang (2013) is an example of such a hybrid approach. While the viability of hybrid approaches to normativity is an interesting and important issue, I put aside questions of how objectivism and subjective positions might be reconciled in order to focus on whether the objectivist can defend her position as-is.

Subjectivists hold that an agent's reasons are grounded in facts about what she favors and disfavors: what she likes, loves, prefers, desires, finds appealing, and their opposites (Sobel 2005; 2019; 2020; Lin 2020b; Schroeder 2007a; 2007b). Objectivists explicitly deny that an agent's favoring attitudes are a source of normative reasons.[2]

I seek to resolve an outstanding problem for the objectivist. The problem is that there is a certain class of choice in which what one favors clearly has some kind of practical significance: permissive choices. And once we recognize that favoring is practically significant here, there is little ground left on which to resist the thought that they are practically significant elsewhere. As Sobel (2016) puts it, permissive choices are the thin edge of the Subjectivist's wedge: establishing that favoring is practically significant here is thus a large step toward the achievement of her larger explanatory ambitions.

Our working example of a permissive choice will be Ann's choice between vanilla and chocolate ice cream. I will suppose throughout that neither flavor is objectively better than the other and that Ann knows this. Nonetheless, Ann likes vanilla and detests chocolate. Many of us have the Subjectivist's Intuition: we think that it would be rational or sensible, broadly construed, for Ann to

[2] A reviewer rightly notes that as formulated, these views invoke potentially objectionable metaphysical assumptions. For instance, these formulations assume that reasons are grounded in, but distinct from, natural facts. Insofar you are an anti-realist about grounding or think that reasons, if they exist, are identical to some non-normative property, you may not be so keen to invoke grounding in the very definition of these views. Fortunately, anti-realists about grounding and normative non-cognitivists can understand the dispute here as concerning the legitimacy of appealing to an agent's attitudes in the game of giving and asking for reasons, with Subjectivists affirming and Objectivists denying that the norms of the game should allow, or do allow, an agent to appeal to her desire-like attitudes. Thus construed, the debate is metaphysically and normatively non-committal.

make her choice by simply choosing what she favors (most). But why is this a rational way for Ann to choose, if not simply because her favoring something gives her some reason to choose it?

My primary aim is to articulate three increasingly attractive replies for the objectivist. The three strategies I explore for accommodating the Subjectivist's Intuition are independent and self-standing, but each is meant to improve on its precursor. I articulate the challenge more fully in §2. Following that , I canvass the standard reply which seeks to explain away favoring's normativity in terms of the value of pleasure (§3). I give old and new reasons to doubt that this reply can succeed. Nonetheless, the failure of the appeal to pleasure furnishes valuable lessons which will serve us in the development of a more sophisticated strategy, a task to which I turn in §4. There, I endeavor to ground the practical significance of favoring attitudes in the practical advantages that accrue to the agent who behaves as-if her favoring attitudes were a source of reasons. In §5, I suggest that the objectivist can do even better to accommodate the practical significance of our favoring attitudes by reconceiving them as the subject of structural permissions which apply specifically to permissive cases. One upshot of my offered solution is that it gives objectivists a principled way to limit the practical import of these attitudes to permissive choices.

2 Permissive Choices

We will begin by characterizing the choices which are troublesome for objectivism. Sobel (2005) calls choices of this sort 'matters of mere taste', while Bratman (2003) calls them 'Buridan cases'. Raz uses the language of 'embarrassment of riches' cases (2011, 182). None of these terms is equivalent, and each brings attention to a different aspect of the choice situation which concerns me in this article.

Raz's term underscores the fact that each of the agent's options is worth choosing in its own right—they are all good. Sobel's designation brings attention to the role that the agent's tastes and fancies play in such choices. Bratman's coinage emphasizes that the attitude-independent reasons for one option do not defeat the reasons for the other option, and vice versa. At this level of description, permissive choices look like a motley crew. But what these choices share is that facts about the options themselves do not compel us to make any particular selection. We enjoy some discretion or latitude in these choices. Hence I call them *permissive choices.*

The choice between two identical bales of hay—or two identical cans at the supermarket—is perhaps the most well-known example of a permissive choice. Choices in which two options are supported by reasons of exactly equal weight have received special attention insofar as they raise the puzzle of how rational choice is even possible in the face of considerations which are perfectly symmetrical. The possibility of rational choice is not my focus in this article. In fact, I take it for granted that we can choose rationally between identical options and that we often do. My concern here is whether objectivists have a plausible explanation of *why* choosing what one favors is a rational way of making these choices, in a broad and generic sense of 'rational.'

An excessive focus on the classic examples risks making us forget that permissive choices are broader than Buridan cases; they also include choices in which our competing reasons are roughly equal, on a par, or incomparable (Chang 1997). If my reasons for vanilla stand in any of these relations with my reasons for chocolate, then no option is worse than any other and I enjoy the same latitude in my choice that I do when my options are identical. It would not be a mistake for me to

choose vanilla, but nor would it be a mistake to choose chocolate. As the name suggests, permissiveness—however it arises—is the defining feature of the choices which concern me here.

Keeping this in mind, the Subjectivist has an easy explanation of why we 'should' choose what we favor. Since favoring some option provides a reason to choose it, the intuitive sense in which Ann 'should' choose vanilla is just the familiar 'should' of most-reason. It is at best unclear whether objectivists can accommodate the datum that favoring is practically relevant for our permissive choices while resisting the Subjectivist's easy explanation of that relevance in terms of normative reasons.

3 The Standard Reply

Scanlon (1998) and Parfit (1997; 2011) have offered what I call 'the standard reply' to the intuition about Ann. The standard reply asserts that the practical significance of Ann's favoring attitudes is exhausted by their epistemic role. Such attitudes do a better or worse job of tracking an agent's reasons, specifically the ones given by pleasure, but they play no role in making those experiences reason-giving. This reply attempts to recover the intuitive sense in which we should choose what we favor by appeal to the fact that in following our favorings we are more likely to choose what we will enjoy. It is rational, smart, prudent, and so forth, to follow our favorings because they track our objective reasons. That is the only sense in which we 'should' choose what we favor. In sum, the standard reply alleges that Subjectivists mistakenly attribute to favoring attitudes the power to

generate the reasons which they merely track when they are properly attuned to our good (Railton 2014).[3]

In my view, there are decisive reasons to regard the standard reply as inadequate. If there is a canonical source of doubt about the standard reply, it stems from a dilemma which Sobel has raised for the objectivist's account of pleasure (Sobel 2005; Copp and Sobel 2002). The dilemma arises from the fact that the objectivist struggles to offer a credible objective account of pleasure's nature and value. We might understand pleasure along the lines of the attitudinal theory of pleasure or along the lines of the phenomenological theory. According to the attitudinal theory, pleasures are complexes of an experience and a favoring attitude directed toward that experience (Heathwood 2006; 2007; Feldman 2004; Lin 2020). So for example, the attitudinal theory says that if you feel a warm tingling sensation at time *t,* and you like that sensation at time *t,* then the warm tingling sensation is a pleasure for you (at time *t*). It is doubtful, however, that objectivists can appeal to attitudinal pleasure to explain away intuitions favoring subjectivism, since on this view whatever normative significance pleasures have is plausibly grounded in the attitudes they contain, in the fact that we favor the sensation we are having. After all, on this account it is the fact that we favor some sensation which makes it a pleasure. The appeal to attitudinal pleasure therefore does nothing to undermine the Subjectivist's contention that normative reasons are grounded in facts about what the agent favors and disfavors.

[3] See Chang (2004) for a nice summary of the standard reply.

Now the other horn. On the phenomenological view, pleasure is identified with some phenomenological quality, and it gives rise to reasons and has value for agents in virtue of the way it feels (Bramble 2013; Rachels 2000). Parfit and Scanlon sometimes talk as if it is a brute normative fact that pleasant feelings are reason-giving. But that is not a very compelling explanation of pleasure's normativity, if it is an explanation at all. It is mysterious why pleasant experiences should be normative if they are just experiences that feel a certain way. Why is *that* phenomenology response-guiding, while other phenomenology is not? An immediate implication of giving certain qualia this basic normative significance is that agents who do not care for those experiences, or even dislike them, will be alienated from their reasons. That is because the phenomenological view implies that these agents have a reason to pursue experiences for which they care not a whit (Sobel 2019). I concur with Sobel that such an implication is a serious cost.

A natural response to the failure of the phenomenological account to shed light on the normativity of pleasure is to say that what makes some phenomenology normative is our attitude to it. My love for warm baths may not be a *component* of my pleasure experience on this understanding, but so long as my love is part of what *makes* taking warm baths choiceworthy for me, the Subjectivist is vindicated. Since attitudes either partly explain why certain experiences are pleasant (and thus reason-giving) or they don't, the horns Sobel identifies seem exhaustive.

No doubt the proponents of the standard reply have some room to maneuver here, and they will need to. But the standard reply has a more immediate problem than the inability to produce an analysis of pleasure. The problem is that pleasure is simply not at issue in all of the cases in which an

agent's favoring attitudes seem normative. Pleasure might not be at issue for a number of reasons; perhaps you must choose between relieving just one of two equally painful headaches, or perhaps you must choose which of two equally deserving candidates will get a job offer. In these permissive choices, the fact that one option appeals to you seems normatively significant in a way that is just not explicable in terms of differences in pleasure. I recognize of course that we often do derive greater pleasure from the things we favor—there is no denying that kernel of truth in the standard reply. I deny merely that the correlation between favoring attitudes and pleasure is up to the task of explaining the full range of cases in which an agent's attitudes are normatively significant. So the standard reply is at best incomplete.

Here is another problematic case. Although I know that I would enjoy two perfectly innocent options to the same extent, nonetheless I favor one and disfavor the other. Presumably, our intuition here is that it would be more rational to choose what I am attracted to rather than what repels me, and that if I choose the option I favor, my favoring it is part of what makes that choice intelligible, sensible, reasonable, and so forth. Cases like these suggest that favoring attitudes have a practical significance that outruns their connection with pleasure (Drai 2012). On the standard reply, I should not even be tempted to think that my favoring attitudes are reasons in a case like this one, since I know that the connection with pleasure has been severed. Intuition does not bear out this claim. The fact that I favor one option and disfavor the other clearly bears on my choice in a way that the subjectivist can plausibly construe as ordinary, everyday favoring.

My aim in the next section is to provide an alternative explanation of the Subjectivist's Intuition, one which builds on the standard reply but avoids these problems.

4 A More Sophisticated Reply

The standard reply sought to explain the intuitive sense in which we should choose what we favor in terms of the objective value of pleasure, and the epistemic (but not metaphysical) connection between favoring and pleasure. The reply I explore here differs in two ways from the standard one. First, it dispenses with the appeal to pleasure and second, it pursues a more indirect explanatory route. The basic idea is to explain the intuition that it is rational to do what we favor in terms of the instrumental value of treating favoring attitudes as reasons in deliberation, even if they aren't reasons in fact.

I begin with a distinction between an agent's reflective judgments about which considerations bear on her choices and the considerations she treats as significant when she deliberates.[4] I take it that in ordinary, non-akratic cases, the pattern of concern that characterizes one's deliberative standpoint coheres reasonably well with one's considered judgments about what is worth doing or choosing. And I take it that in ordinary, non-permissive cases, one cannot do better than to identify the most valuable option and choose in accordance with one's best reckoning. But such a reckon-and-choose policy is not an effective way of making permissive choices, since there is either no objectively best or no option which the agent can know is best. If an objectivist is to make these choices at all rather than die between two equally good or incommensurable options, she needs a

[4] The sophisticated reply gets its name from Railton's (1984) deservedly famous discussion of two-tier normative theories.

policy that issues a decision even when her objective reasons have run out. She needs to be more sophisticated.

The sophisticated agent I have in mind is willing to deliberate like a Subjectivist in permissive choices, even though she denies on reflection that her attitudes are reason-giving.[5] So for example, an agent who is sophisticated about her desire to wear yellow may think, on reflection, that her desire to wear yellow is not normative for her, perhaps because there is nothing that makes yellow more choiceworthy than any other color. Nonetheless, she displays a willingness to regard her desire to wear yellow as a reason to wear yellow if doing so will have some practical payoff. As I just said, sophistication pays in permissive choices, since it allows agents to make a choice when their objective reasons do not favor any option on balance. According to the sophisticated objectivist then, the practical import of favoring derives from the place that favoring plays in a useful deliberative policy for making permissive choices. The intuition that it is rational to choose what one favors is owed to the fact that following one's favorings is an effective way of resolving these difficult but unfortunately common choices.

At this point, a reader may worry that the sophisticated objectivist is *too* sophisticated to be psychologically plausible. But I have two responses to this worry. The first is that the story I am offering is a justificatory story—I do not claim that a particular agent's desires are normative because

[5] The psychological implementation of deliberative policies have been extensively worked out elsewhere, for example in Bratman (1987; 2007). Note that Bratman offers a more substantial account of what it is to adopt a deliberative policy according to which it involves giving some favoring or disfavoring attitude the ability to be "end-setting" and 'structure further deliberation.' Though I invoke Bratman's terminology, I do not mean to commit myself to this more substantive account of deliberative policies.

she actually is sophisticated, merely that there is rational and psychologically possible policy of the sort I describe. The second response is that the policy I describe is not so psychologically implausible, as there is substantial empirical evidence that we behave strategically in permissive choices, and in ways which are continuous with what I have described above. No doubt this behavior takes many forms, as do permissive choices. But the important point for our discussion is that agents seek to resolve permissive choices by employing shortcuts, heuristics, and policies which seek to minimize the cost of decision-making rather than maximize the value of the chosen option (Ullmann-Margalit 2017b). The name of the game is to choose as cheaply and quickly as possible.

In practice, this is often achieved by the use of some randomization device like a coin. One way a coin might help me choose is by providing me with evidence about my own preferences, as when I toss the coin just to see how I react to the result. People often recommend that we use coins this way. They say: 'Assign an option to each side of the coin. Observe your own reaction, then choose accordingly.' There is another way of using coins that is arguably primary and more common and this is what I have in mind. Sometimes we just let the coin select an option for us. In the language of Ullmann-Margalit (2017a) we use the coin to make an arbitrary selection, we *pick* an option rather than *choose* one. Though you are no doubt familiar with the practice of tossing coins, picking need not involve coin tosses. We also pick when we elevate some arbitrary factor to the level of a decisive reason, or pre-committing to the flavor that is newest or furthest to the left. The thoroughly pragmatic nature of our behavior in permissive choices is beyond question. We do not accept the advice to pick the newest or leftmost flavor because we think it will help us choose *correctly* (Stone 2014). We are simply looking to pick something.

As I have been suggesting, the sophisticated objectivist can be understood as a kind of picker. The sophisticate looks upon certain favorings, such as her desire to wear yellow, as one of so many arbitrary differences on which she can seize to prevent the deliberative mechanism from breaking down. "The coin landed heads'" is one such difference, "I just feel like vanilla today" is another. And the sophisticated reply suggests that the explanation of their practical significance is the very same. They derive whatever significance they have from their role in a useful deliberative policy.

I conclude my discussion of the sophisticated reply by noting how it fairs with respect to the problems that beset the standard reply, and by subjecting it to several further objections. Recall that apart from the trouble the objectivist has in offering an account of pleasure, the standard reply cannot account for the practical significance of favoring attitudes which do not track our hedonic reasons. But as we saw, many favoring attitudes are plausibly not connected with pleasure in the required way. The sophisticated reply avoids these problems because the payoff which makes it rational to choose what you favor in permissive choices is not hedonic. The practical payoff of following your favorings is that you continue to function as an agent at all, and it's the objective value of rational agency that rationalizes choosing what one favors in permissive choices. What's more, even if following my favoring somehow fails to serve me in any particular choices, I am clearly doing better than the agent who cannot choose in permissive choices.

Although the sophisticated reply improves upon the standard reply in several crucial respects, I think the reply has costs which should prompt us to look for a better solution. The first objection I will consider is that the sophisticated reply does not account for a central feature of our favoring attitudes, namely their valence. Ann likes the taste of vanilla. That attitude provides *support* of some

kind for choosing vanilla ice cream; it is not a reason against choosing vanilla. And likewise, her distaste for chocolate is a reason *against* choosing chocolate. It's not clear that the sophisticated objectivist can account for these facts about valence with the present machinery.

To highlight this, imagine that Ann adopts a policy of treating her taste for vanilla as a reason *against* choosing vanilla and her distaste for chocolate as a reason *for* choosing chocolate. Although such a policy would be truly bizarre, it is hard to deny that such a policy, when successfully carried out, would be just as effective at extricating her from a permissive choice as the familiar policy of treating favorings as reasons-for and disfavorings as reasons-against. But clearly this bizarre policy would not capture the practical significance that these attitudes intuitively have for ordinary agents, and what's more, it strikes us that following this policy would be much less rational than following a policy of choosing what one favors.[6] So, the sophisticated objectivist better not say that they are equally rational.

I think the sophisticate can make a narrow escape. Because favorings and disfavorings enjoy their normal motivational profiles even in bizarre agents, these agents will face tremendous psychological difficulty in treating their attractions as reasons to avoid and their revulsions as reasons to pursue. It will be much harder, and I presume much more costly, to carry out a policy totally contrary to one's inclinations than one which harmonizes with them. Thus while the bizarre

[6] I note that this objection from bizarro policies also affects the sophisticated view offered by Tanyi (2011). On this view, an agent's decision to regard a subset of her desires as decision-making tools is justified by reference to a reason to act spontaneously or efficiently (221). On the assumption that acting against my desires would promote be spontaneous or efficient to the same extent as acting *with* my desires, these policies are equally good or rational by the lights of his view.

policy may be just as good at securing the agent's continued functioning when it is successfully followed, it is more difficult and costly to follow, and for that reason is inferior in practical terms to the policy which attributes to favorings and disfavorings their ordinary significance.

That being said, the bizarre policy's badness-from-a-practical-standpoint is a reason to choose what we favor only on the assumption that we consider the costs of non-compliance and psychological friction in our calculus. If we *do* include the costs of non-compliance and the like in the assessment of a policy, then the solution to this objection is simple enough. We simply maintain that choosing what we favor is rationalized by the fact that favorings are treated as reasons-for and disfavorings as reasons-against in the *best* policy for resolving permissive choices. But to the extent that replying to the objection from bizarre policies requires a further and unobvious assumption about how to evaluate deliberative policies, it saddles the sophisticated reply with a vulnerability I'd rather do without.[7]

The objectivist's appeal to instrumental value may also commit her to counterintuitive verdicts about demon-cases. Suppose an evil demon intervenes to eliminate the practical costs of following the bizarre policy, so that following such a policy is, in practical terms, just as good as choosing what one favors. The sophisticate is committed to saying that in the demon-scenario it is

[7] Replying to the objection requires that we subscribe to actualism, at least in some limited domain. Actualists maintain that the rationality of some action or policy depends on how I would actually act were I to adopt that policy (Jackson and Pargetter 1986). And I have offered reasons to think that if I adopted the bizarre policy, I would act very ineffectively. On the other hand, I *could* effectively pursue the bizarre policy, if I could just summon the willpower to fight my inclinations, and for that reason one might think that the policy is no worse than the ordinary one (Portmore 2019). After all, if I pursued both policies unfailingly, they would be equally effective at securing the agential good in question. Obviously, establishing the truth of actualism is beyond the scope of this paper. I introduce the debate merely to underscore how controversial the needed assumption is.

just as rational to follow the bizarre policy as it is to choose what you favor. That might be true, so long as by 'rational' we mean something narrow, like 'expedient' or 'prudent'. But understandably, you might think that, even if treating my distaste for chocolate as a reason for chocolate has a pragmatic payoff, it is just unfitting for one's choices and favoring attitudes to be related in this way, and so the sophisticate misses something important about the nature of favoring as such. At bottom, this is why I cannot endorse the sophisticated reply. It is not really an account of the practical relevance of favoring *as such*. It only tells us that favoring attitudes possess whatever generic features allow an agent to use them to extricate herself from permissive choices.[8] Favoring attitudes are just like internal coinflips.

There is something *prima facie* surprising about the claim that 'feeling like' vanilla ice cream plays the same role in our practical lives as a coin flip. While am confident that our favoring attitudes *can* play the role outlined above and sometimes do, I am much less certain that their playing this role within deliberative policies exhausts the practical relevance of our attitudes, even in permissive choices.

Finally, this indirect explanatory strategy fits poorly with the tenor of the justification we offer for our permissive choices. We say things like "I just felt like vanilla today" with the 'just' here

[8] Because the sophisticated view offers a purely instrumental justification for choosing what we favor, it turns out that favoring has only a very indirect connection with reasons, contrary to appearances. At least on the standard reply, the objectivist had a plausible story to tell about the Subjectivist's mistake. Since on the standard reply favoring attitudes really do bear some systematic relationship to our reasons, the Subjectivist makes the understandable mistake of thinking that favoring gives rise to the reasons with which it is merely entangled. But this sort of error theory is unavailable to the sophisticate, since by her lights the connection between favoring and reasons is a mere appearance to be explained away by the role that favoring (can) play in our rational life broadly.

signaling that there's nothing more to it. But if the sophisticated reply is right, there's a *lot* more to it. It's not the mere fact that one favors an option that rationalizes choosing it, but a far more complex and hypothetical story about the role favoring attitudes could play in an (ideally) rational policy. Thus, the sophisticated view does not capture an important aspect of the intuition with which we started: the idea that favoring justifies our choices *directly*.

I am unsure whether these considerations refute the sophisticated reply. But they do provide some reason to be dissatisfied with it. In the following section I try to capture the Subjectivist's Intuition more fully, tenor and all, without as much revision to our ordinary thought.

5 When all else fails, call for backup

Each of the proposals we have considered grows out of an observation about permissive choices. The observation which motivates the standard reply is that our favoring attitudes are closely entangled with our pleasure-based reasons. The sophisticated reply makes much of the fact that permissive choices pose a kind of practical problem that needs a solution. While I think that these are genuine insights about the practical context in question, I think that it is difficult to carve an attractive path from them to the Subjectivist's Intuition. The reply I offer here begins with the thought that what makes permissive choices distinctive is the fact that agents cannot effectively guide their choices by their beliefs about oughts. I will argue that this opens up a lacuna into which favoring attitudes may rationally enter. I cash out this idea by arguing that agents enjoy a rational permission to base their choices on their favoring attitudes when they cannot choose on the basis of their beliefs in the ordinary way.

Before I argue for this claim, however, I want to argue that structural rationality countenances the sort of permission which I hope to defend. Once I've done that, I will show how the permission in question helps the objectivist account for the Subjectivist's Intuition.

Structural rationality has been given numerous, importantly different, and possibly incompatible characterizations. For the purposes of this paper, I understand structural rationality in terms of wide-scope principles, and to be concerned with how an agent's attitudes cohere in a broad and informal sense of that term (Worsnip 2021; n.d.). I join many others in thinking that rationality requires that our intentions fit together with our all-things-considered judgments about what we ought to do. In other words, the following is plausibly a principle of structural rationality.

Enkratic Requirement (ER)

Rationality requires of S that (S intends to Φ if S believes that she herself ought to Φ).

Broome's rough gloss on the ER is as follows: "Rationality requires of you that, if you believe you ought to do something, you intend to do it" (2013, 34). One important lesson from the literature is that satisfying principles like the ER is not sufficient for full structural rationality. That is because some ways of coming into conformity with ER are intuitively irrational (Broome 2013; 2007; Kolodny 2005). To illustrate, suppose you believe that you ought to donate to charity but do not intend to donate, and that you have no other attitudes. There are two ways to bring yourself into conformity with ER. One way is by forming the intention to donate. The other way is by dropping your belief that you ought to donate. But intuitively, these are not equally rational ways of conducting yourself. Structural rationality should not allow you to alter your normative beliefs to fit

your intentions, even when meddling with your beliefs in this way suffices for conforming to the enkratic requirement.

Thus, theorists have supplemented ER with further principles that identify and forbid objectionable ways of conforming with the ER:

Wishful Thinking Prohibition (WTP)

> Rationality prohibits S from dropping her belief that she herself ought to Φ solely on the basis that she does not intend to Φ.

The WTP is a basing prohibition, a kind of basing principle. Basing prohibitions like the WTP have received some development in virtue of being dialectically important for the defense of wide-scope principles, as just mentioned. But in addition to prohibitions, structural rationality also extends to us basing *permissions* (Broome 2013, 189). I will argue, briefly, that structural rationality must feature basing permissions if it is possible to comply with structural norms rather than merely conform to them by accident.

As many have remarked, to call someone structurally irrational is to criticize them (Kiesewetter 2017; Worsnip 2021; Parfit 2011). If, as these authors think, akratic agents are open to criticism rather than merely pity for their poor rational functioning, it must be that agents who violate the ER have a route back into conformity with it. Otherwise, we would be criticizing you for being in a state from which you cannot rationally escape. As we saw, structural rationality forbids you from taking certain routes. You cannot drop your belief that you ought to donate on the sole ground that you do not intend to donate—that would be wishful thinking.

That leaves only one route back into conformity with the ER, namely forming an intention to Φ. Assuming that you have no other attitudes, the only ground you have for forming that intention is the belief that you ought to Φ. If you were forbidden from intending to Φ on the ground that you believe you ought to, then you would be forbidden from doing what you must to conform to the ER. But structural rationality cannot forbid you from doing what you must do to be structurally rational. Thus you must be permitted to intend to Φ on the ground that you believe you ought to Φ. And that is simply to say that structural rationality features at least one basing permission, this one:

Enkratic Permission (EP)

> Rationality permits S to form an intention to Φ on the basis of S's belief that she herself ought to Φ.

If the Enkratic Permission is true, akratic agents always have a route back into conformity with the ER. The EP secures that route. So the Enkratic Permission is a straightforward corollary of the principles that structuralists already accept. Having established that, I hope to defend a more substantial permission, one that permits Ann to form the intention to choose to Φ on the sole ground that she favors Φ-ing, so long as she is unable to base her intentions on her beliefs in the usual way.

Backup Permission (BP)

> If S believes that there is no option Φ such that S ought to Φ, or S has no belief of the form 'S ought to Φ' and cannot rationally form such a belief, then rationality permits S to intend to Φ solely on the basis that she favors Φ.

The first two clauses describe the distinctive practical circumstances to which the Backup Permission applies. In actual permissive choices, there is no option one ought to choose even given all the facts. In apparently permissive choices, the agent cannot rationally form a belief about what she ought to do even on her best evidence (though a best option there may be). Either way, she cannot rationally form the relevant ought-belief, the one that features in the enkratic principles. Thus, agents in actual or permissive choices fall outside the scope of the Enkratic Requirement. Presumably though, structural rationality continues to govern agents who fall outside the jurisdiction of the ER. My suggestion is that the Backup Permission 'kicks in' at precisely such times, granting agents permission to base an intention to choose something on some ground other than the belief that she ought to do so. The Backup Permission is meant to supplement the Enkratic Requirement, hence its name.

In other words, if Ann cannot choose on the basis of her ought-beliefs, this does not exempt her from the general requirement to have some rational basis for her actions and choices. Even when circumstances prevent her from answering the question 'What ought I to do?' she still faces the question 'What do I do?' The practical question remains pressing, even when our reasons have run out. Thus, structural rationality issues Ann a special permission to intend to Φ just because she favors Φ-ing.

It is important to understand the nature of the permission which rationality extends to us. BP does not bestow upon Ann a generic and weak permission to take her favoring attitudes into account—she is already permitted to take them into account insofar as they are evidence of objective reasons. Rather, BP permits Ann and similarly situated agents to employ their favoring attitudes in a

very particular way. BP permits Ann to use her favoring to *settle* her permissive choice, and this role for favoring goes beyond their merely evidential role in non-permissive choices (a role which objectivists can recognize, as we saw). What's more, the backup permission is narrowly tailored. BP singles out favoring Φ *specifically* as a proper ground for Ann's intention to Φ—it does not pick out favoring attitudes by way of some functional description they share with other things, like coinflips. Hence the present view avoids the surprising implication that favoring attitudes are nothing more than pawns in the game of strategic choice. To the extent that we think that our attractions and repulsions have a distinctive significance for permissive choices, my proposal delivers that thought.

One might object here that favoring only settles the issue in permissive choices because the agent's reasons are equally strong. When that is so, the addition of a reason of any weight on either side would be decisive. But that is not the correct explanation of how favoring bears on Buridan cases, as we can see by the fact that favoring settles *all* permissive choices, even those in which the reasons are not equally strong. Even if Ann's reasons to choose vanilla are incommensurable with her reasons to choose chocolate, I take it that it is highly rational, sensible, and so forth for Ann to choose the option she likes, and merely because she likes it. BP tells us that Ann's inability to guide her intentions by her ought-beliefs is what licenses that way of choosing, and Ann suffers that inability in all permissive choices, not just Buridan cases.[9]

[9] Here is an alternative rationale for the permission to choose what we favor, relative to which I would like to situate my view. According to this alternative, when there is no answer to the question 'What do I have most reason to do?', as in permissive choices, there is simply no other factual question which can step in to settle the practical issue of how to choose. In other words, the alternative embraces non-factualism about permissive choices, and derives the permission straightaway from that view. Justin Clarke-Doane (2023), Joseph Raz (2011, ch. 9) and Olle Risberg (2023) for example,

That being said, BP tells us only that Ann's inability to guide her intentions by her ought-beliefs is *sufficient* for permission to simply choose what appeals to her. BP does *not* say that these practical conditions are necessary for us to enjoy this permission, however. Hence an objector might claim that favoring attitudes play this same deciding role in non-permissive choices as well. But it is implausible that our attitudes play this deciding role in non-permissive choices. If you ought to Φ and your only alternative is ~Φ-ing, the mere fact that you favor ~Φ-ing clearly does not settle, by itself, the issue of what you ought or may do. You are not permitted to form the intention to ~Φ just because you favor the idea of ~Φ-ing. This is clearly wishful thinking, and not even committed Subjectivists think that favoring bears on our choices like *that*.

Earlier I said that BP applies even to apparently permissive cases, which cannot be said of the previous accounts. This is important because no doubt many of us have the Subjectivist's Intuition in both kinds of choice. Suppose I must choose between two cars which are identical in every respect, except for two. Car A is red, and far more fuel-efficient, while car B is blue and far less fuel-efficient. I highly value fuel-efficiency but have no strong preference regarding color. Given the facts, car A is more choiceworthy for me and I have most reason to choose it. Nonetheless, a highly reliable source

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appear to embrace non-factualism about permissive choices, maintaining that when reasons run out, there is nothing more to say, and no fact of the matter about how the agent ought to choose. But this strikes me as a cost. Non-factualism conflicts with our intuition that there is an *obvious* normative truth here: Ann should choose vanilla, since she favors it. Admittedly, Ann cannot resolve her choice by asking herself the standard question: What do I have most reason to do? But if my view is correct, Ann can resolve the practical issue by asking herself a more complex question: 'Do my reasons require me to choose any particular option, and if not, which option most appeals to me?' Because there is a theoretical question Ann can use to settle her practical issue, permissive choices are no different in this respect from choices in which reasons decisively favor one option. The only difference is that on my view, the agent must make some more complex determination in permissive choices. Thanks to a reviewer for bringing this non-factualist rationale to my attention and for suggesting that my view allows us to maintain a thoroughgoing factualism.

tells me that the two cars are identical in their fuel efficiency and in every respect besides color. Hence, I non-culpably believe that the choice is permissive. I choose the much worse car, B, just because its color appeals to me at that moment. I think it is clear that while I have made a mistake, I have not acted irrationally. BP explains why I have done nothing irrational. Given that my evidence precluded me from rationally believing that I ought to choose one car over the other, I was entitled to make the decision entirely on the basis of my color preferences. And that is what I did.

Finally, appealing to structural rationality rather than epistemic or broadly 'pragmatic' reasons enables the objectivist to achieve her main dialectical goal here: limiting the Subjectivist's explanatory ambitions. BP is an attractive way to place a principled limit on the practical import of our favoring attitudes because it derives the practical import of favoring attitudes from an essential feature of permissive choices, the agent's inability to base her intentions on her normative beliefs in the usual way.

You might have a worry along these lines: it is just too convenient that structural rationality grants objectivists an additional basis for rational choice at the moment they need it most. What accounts for this great serendipity? I do not think talk of luck is warranted, for two reasons. First, BP is well-motivated by the independently plausible idea that rational agents are rationally permitted to do what they must do to act rationally. So if rationality requires agents to make their choices on some basis, as I believe it does, then when reasons run out structural rationality must relax its definition of a suitable basis if it is to be possible for us to choose rationally. According to BP, rationality minimally expands its conception of a suitable basis to explain why even Ann's brute attraction to vanilla matters as much as it does, and in the way it does.

Second, I want to emphasize that BP is an independently plausible explanation of why favoring attitudes enjoy the privileged status they do in our everyday choices. Even aside from the debate about the 'source' of normativity, the question of why we are entitled to choose something *just because* we feel like it in some choices but not others is a pressing and substantial question, to which BP provides a cogent and plausible answer. I recognize, of course, that this question is especially pressing, and the phenomena especially problematic, for those who deny that desires are reason-giving. However, even if BP did not help us defend our preferred view about normativity, BP has independent merits as an answer to the aforementioned question. Objectivists are far from the only ones in need of an answer to this question.

I now consider an objection that should be familiar from the discussion of the sophisticated view. Why does structural rationality feature the Backup Permission rather than, or in addition to, the Bizarro Permission? The Bizarro Permission says that agents may choose what they disfavor, just because they disfavor it, in permissive choices. To put it simply, why does rationality not grant us permission to choose chocolate simply because we hate chocolate? That is a ridiculous way to conduct yourself, of course, but if the Backup Permission is genuine there should be some story to tell about why structural rationality features *it* rather than the Bizarro Permission.

Fortunately, it is easy to see that structural rationality disapproves of forming intentions according to the Bizarro Permission. If you recall, I am working with a conception of coherence concerned with how an agent's attitudes fit together in a broad, non-logical sense. It seems plain to

me that, even though intending to Φ and disfavoring Φ are not logically incoherent, these attitudes fit together less well than those of an agent who intends to Φ just because she likes Φ-ing.

Agents who are less structurally rational are less intelligible, and more difficult to interpret. We have no difficulty interpreting an agent who intends to Φ on the ground that she favors Φ-ing, while an agent who believes say, p and ~p, is just unintelligible. The Bizarro agent is found in between these two points, and therefore is not fully structurally rational. Her attitudes pose some difficulty for interpretation without making interpretation impossible. If you are like me, you feel some pressure to attribute further attitudes to her to make sense of what she is doing. Perhaps she has lost a bet and believes that choosing what she dislikes is the only way to preserve her honor? Or perhaps she hates herself or attaches value to her own displeasure? The point is, the Bizarro agent's attitudes clash in a way that damages—but does not totally efface—her interpretability.

Here is one more objection to the way I have employed structural rationality. Earlier I said that the objectivist's appeal to the Backup Permission allows her to avoid compromising her position on normative reasons. That is only true on the assumption that basing permissions are issued by structural rationality rather than by substantive rationality. One might dispute that. For example, you might think that the border between structural and substantive rationality lies elsewhere, so that the matter of which attitudes can be based on which is actually a substantive matter, not a structural one. Another way to contest this assumption is to deny that there is any border between substantive and structural rationality at all, say because structural rationality reduces to substantive rationality (Kiesewetter 2017; Lord 2018).

In that vein, the objector might interpret BP as saying something quite substantive, namely that in permissive contexts favoring Φ *just is* a reason to Φ. Though this is not how I intend for BP to be interpreted, the interpretation draws some plausibility from the fact that at least one theorist has claimed that to be a reason to Φ *just is* to be a good basis for Φ-ing (Gregory 2016). As my discussion of the sophisticated reply shows, however, I would insist on a sharp distinction between the considerations it is rational to treat as a basis for Φ-ing and the factors which genuinely favor Φ-ing. We can lean on that distinction once more to meet this objection. On my preferred interpretation, BP grants favoring attitudes the status of rational bases without thereby making them into normative reasons.

That being said, even if Gregory is right that being a good basis for Φ-ing is sufficient for being a reason to Φ, and even if structural rationality is just substantive rationality in disguise, BP still allows the objectivist to achieve her main dialectical goal insofar as it allows her to place firm and principled limits on the practical significance of favoring. If I am right that BP effectively halts the Subjectivist's broader explanatory ambitions, then to my mind the concession that favoring attitudes are a kind of basis of last resort does not seriously damage the broadly objective conception of normativity on offer.

6 Conclusion

Objectivists have struggled to explain why choosing what one favors is such a sensible way to resolve everyday, permissive choices. I examined and rejected two replies, the standard reply and the sophisticated reply. The standard reply alleges that desires derive their practical relevance from their

connection to pleasure. That can't be right, because pleasure is not at issue in many of the choices in which favoring is relevant, and because even when pleasure is at issue, choosing what we favor is not always conducive to pleasure. The sophisticated objectivist instead seeks to vindicate the subjectivist's intuition by pointing to the fact that agents who deliberate as if their desires are reasons act more effectively in permissive choices. But I rejected this reply because it seems too revisionary of our intuitions and makes several counterintuitive predictions. Nonetheless, there is something right about the thought that permissive choices represent a practical problem to which she needs some solution.

On my preferred view, structural rationality issues us a dispensation when our reasons run out. The necessity of acting on some basis or other, combined with the practical conditions agents face in permissive choices, expand the class of considerations on which we can rationally choose to include favoring. But here's the kicker: Rationality licenses choosing what we favor not because favoring is reason-giving, but rather because we must regulate our choices somehow, even when we cannot rationally form the beliefs about oughts by which we are ordinarily required to regulate them. This view significantly advances our understanding of how desire-like attitudes bear on the rationality of action, while at the same time meeting what I take to be the most serious challenge to objectivism about normative reasons.

My view may have implications for other issues in practical rationality, but especially for perspectivalism about rationality. Perspectivalists say that what an agent can do rationally is determined by the set of facts to which she bears some epistemic relation, such as knowledge or belief. If I am right that commitments put us in a distinctive practical relationship to certain

normatively significant facts, then specifying an agent's epistemic relation to the normatively relevant facts may not be enough to determine what is rational for her to do, think, and feel. We may also need to know whether she stands in a practical relationship to these facts.

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