

Reasons and Theoretical Rationality

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Forthcoming in Daniel Star (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Reasons and Normativity*

I. Introduction

It might not be wise to turn left even if that would be for the best and it might be wise to turn right even if that would be disastrous. Because of our nearly limitless ignorance, we're often forced to choose between options where the best option is one only a fool would choose. When philosophers use the term 'rational' to talk about rational decisions or choices, they talk as if rational decisions are wise decisions, not necessarily fortunate ones. Whether a decision is wise or rational depends largely upon how things look from your perspective. When philosophers talk about rational beliefs, they likewise talk as if it's the features of your perspective that determine whether a belief is rational or not. To rationally believe p it must be intelligible or sensible for someone with a perspective like yours to answer the question whether p in the affirmative. If you were in a situation where your beliefs didn't fit the facts but were nevertheless supported by your evidence, they'd be rational. A Cartesian demon, for example, might cause someone to undergo a series of experiences indistinguishable from yours and while this subject would know much less about her surroundings than you do, it seems you'd both be equally rational in your beliefs.¹

If this internalist intuition is correct, pairs of subjects with perfectly similar perspectives will be equally rational in their beliefs:

Rationality Supervenes upon the Mental (RSM):
Necessarily, if A and B are identical in terms of their non-factive mental states, it is rational for A to believe p iff it is rational for B to believe p .²

RSM tells us that *ex ante* rationality supervenes upon a subject's non-factive mental states. It's rational for non-factive mental duplicates to believe the same propositions. As for *ex post* rationality, if two subjects are in the same non-factive mental states and their beliefs are based on the same things, their beliefs will be equally rational.³

¹ See Cohen (1984), Wedgwood (2002), and the papers in Dorsch and Dutant (forthcoming) for discussion of the new evil demon objection to reliabilism (i.e., the objection that reliabilism delivers the wrong verdicts in cases of systematic deception because it says that the beliefs formed by the systematically deceived are not justified). Cohen's target is a reliabilist theory of justification, but he thinks that justification and rationality come to the same thing. We will discuss the relationship between justification and rationality briefly below.

² Let us say that non-factive mental states are states that are of a type where instances of that type have propositional content and some of these contents are false. While it is not possible to falsely believe that one is a thinker, it is possible to falsely believe that it is raining, so belief counts as a non-factive mental state. Defenders of RSM think that just as the rationality of belief supervenes upon certain aspects of our mental life, the same is true for suspension and disbelief. For defenses of RSM, see Audi (2001), Broome (2013), Cohen (1984), Conee and Feldman (2008), and Wedgwood (2002).

³ Kvanvig and Menzel (1990) take *ex post* rationality to be a matter of *ex ante* rationality plus proper basing. For a helpful overview of the literature on the basing relation, see Korcz (2010).

RSM is a consequence of two further seemingly plausible supervenience theses:

Rationality Supervenes upon the Evidence (RSE):
Necessarily, if A and B are identical in terms of their evidence, it's rational for A to believe p iff it's rational for B to believe p .⁴

Evidence Supervenes upon the Mental (ESM):
Necessarily, if A and B non-factive mental duplicates, they are evidential duplicates.⁵

According to RSE, there cannot be differences in ex ante rationality without an evidential difference. If we have precisely the same evidence for our beliefs, it couldn't be that my evidence provides a sufficient degree of support unless yours does, too. According to ESM, there cannot be differences in our evidence without some difference in our non-factive mental states. As Cohen sees it, if we're deceived by a demon, "we would have every reason for holding our beliefs that we have in the actual world" (1984: 281). His demon would manipulate us by feeding us reasons, the reasons we actually have. We would be completely ignorant about our surroundings, but we might still be perfectly rational in our beliefs.

Why does rationality supervene upon the mental? A standard explanation is an evidentialist explanation. The evidentialist tries to explain RSM by defending an account of evidence on which facts about the evidence supervene upon facts about a subject's non-factive mental states and an account of the relationship between evidence and rationality according to which rationality is 'a product of evidence' (Conee and Feldman 2004: 83), something that results from having 'on balance' support for a proposition (Conee and Feldman 2008: 83). So understood, evidentialism is a grounding thesis with these core commitments:

The Dependence Thesis: It's only rational for you to believe p when you possess evidence that provides sufficient support for believing p .

The Priority Thesis: If it's rational to believe p , it's rational for you to believe p because you possess evidence for p , not the other way around.

The Structural Sufficiency Thesis: If it's rational for you to believe p , it's rational because the right support relations hold between your evidence and this belief.

As attractive as this package of views initially seems, we'll see in what follows that it's difficult to answer some important questions about reasons and rationality within an evidentialist framework.

2. The Stuff Reasons are Made Of

⁴ Conee and Feldman (2004, 2008) and McCain (2014) defend this claim.

⁵ Cohen (1984), Conee and Feldman (2004, 2008), Greco (2000), McCain (2014), and (possibly) Turri (2009) defend this claim. It's interesting to note that Greco defended an externalist account of the status of justification in spite of accepting a view on which the evidence supervenes upon a subject's non-factive mental states. Part of his disagreement with internalists about justification was a disagreement about whether the status of justification supervened upon relations between your evidence and your beliefs.

ESM doesn't tell us what evidence you have because it doesn't tell us what evidence is or what's involved in its possession. Let's look at some recent debates about the constitution of evidence and see what these debates tell us about the evidentialist view.

It will simplify our discussion if we proceed by treating reasons and evidence as if they're interchangeable. We'll revisit the question as to whether this thesis is actually true later:

The Reasons-Evidence Identification Thesis (REI): X is an epistemic reason (i.e., something that bears on whether to believe) iff X is a piece of evidence.

Although many epistemologists do treat reasons and pieces of evidence interchangeably, it's not always clear what kind of reason they have in mind. Let's divide reasons into three types:

Normative reasons: The reasons that bear on whether to ϕ .

Motivating reasons: The reasons that are your reasons for ϕ -ing or the reasons for which you ϕ .⁶

Explanatory reasons: The reasons why you ϕ 'd.⁷

Normative reasons determine whether you ought to ϕ , apply to you, demand things from you, and can be overlooked. Motivating reasons cannot be overlooked. In specifying your reasons for ϕ -ing, we have to try to capture the light in which you ϕ 'd by capturing what, from your perspective, made ϕ -ing seem appropriate, attractive, fitting, or required.⁸ Because it's possible to be moved by bad reasons, it's possible for your reasons for ϕ -ing to be no reason at all to ϕ . And because it's possible to overlook reasons to ϕ , there might be reasons to ϕ that aren't your reasons for doing or believing anything at all. Thus, motivating reasons needn't be normative and normative reasons needn't be motivating. Having said that, it's *possible* to ϕ for *good* reasons. This suggests that the difference between motivating and normative reasons isn't that they are different things but that they do different things.⁹

How do explanatory reasons fit into the picture? Any motivating reason is an explanatory reason. If your reason for going to the store or believing that a thief slipped into your apartment is that the gin is gone, your reason for doing this and thinking that is a reason why you do and think what you do. The converse doesn't

⁶ Notice that on this way of understanding motivating reasons (and explanatory reasons since (arguably) motivating reasons are just a special case of explanatory reasons), there is a sense in which a motivating reason cannot be present but overridden. We thus might want to make room for a distinction between motivating reasons (i.e., the reasons in light of which someone thought, felt, or did something) and merely potential motivating reasons (i.e., the things that could have been the subject's reasons had things gone differently).

⁷ For helpful discussions of these different kinds of reasons, see Alvarez (2010), McNaughton and Rawling (this volume), and Wiland (this volume).

⁸ See McDowell (1978). Motivating reasons don't always show that there was anything good about ϕ -ing because an agent could have the wrong values. In specifying your reasons we try to describe what you took to be good about ϕ -ing.

⁹ See Dancy (1999).

hold. A reason why you believe that someone has been in your flat is that you've forgotten that you drank all the gin. That's not your reason for thinking that some thief made off with your gin. (Obviously, it's not a reason to believe someone stole your gin!) Like explanatory reasons, all motivating reasons explain why someone ϕ 'd. Motivating reasons do this in a distinctive way. They capture what it was from your perspective that made ϕ -ing seem like an appropriate response. Since all motivating reasons are explanatory, the difference between these reasons won't be ontological, but will have to do with the explanations they're appropriate for. Not every answer to the question, 'Why did she ϕ ' is intended to tell us what the agent took to be good about ϕ -ing.

Epistemologists often talk about *possessed* reasons.¹⁰ Possessed reasons are *potential* motivating reasons (i.e., things that could be your reasons for believing things whether you reason from them or not). It's important to introduce this notion because when you have a reason or some evidence, it's within your cognitive grasp and is the kind of thing that directly bears on whether it would be rational for you to believe. Assuming that the reasons for which you ϕ are always possessed reasons, possessed reasons should belong to the same ontological category as normative, motivating, and explanatory reasons.

So, what are reasons? A standard answer, and one that fits quite nicely with views that incorporate ESM and REI, is that epistemic reasons are *in the head*:

Statism: Reasons are states of mind or mental events.¹¹

The two main rivals to statism are views on which reasons are things we have *in mind*:

Propositionalism: Reasons are the contents of certain mental states.¹²

Factualism: Reasons are facts or true propositions.¹³

¹⁰ Some philosophers think that possessed reasons are normative reasons but others do not. I shall return to this issue later because I think that it is both controversial whether all the normative reasons that bear on whether someone should ϕ are possessed in the relevant sense (i.e., that the individual is somehow aware of them or should be aware of them), controversial whether any possessed reason is, *inter alia*, a normative reason, and unclear what people mean when they say that all possessed reasons are normative reasons.

¹¹ For defenses of statism, see Brueckner (2009), Cohen (1984), Davidson (2001), Conee and Feldman (2008), Gibbons (2014), McCain (2014), Moser (2001), Pollock (1974), and Turri (2009).

¹² For defenses of propositionalism, see Comesana and McGrath (2014), Fantl and McGrath (2009), and Schroeder (2008). Dancy (1999) thinks that ascriptions of motivating reasons are non-factive (as do these authors), but thinks that your reasons for ϕ -ing are nevertheless never falsehoods. Some of these authors like the view that all reasons are propositions but then add the proviso that a proposition cannot be a motivating reason unless you bear the right mental relation to it and that a proposition cannot be a normative reason unless it bears the right relation to the world and is a true proposition. I think that the linguistic evidence counts against this view. It seems, for example, that an ascription of a motivating reason (e.g., S's reason for ϕ -ing is that p) entails a corresponding knowledge ascription (e.g., S knows p). See Unger (1975), Hornsby (2007), and Littlejohn (2012) for discussion.

Although statism is quite popular in epistemological circles, it's considerably less popular outside of them. If you think about the normative reasons that bear on whether to act in a certain way, they seem to be facts about the situation. If there's a good reason for Agnes to pull over, it would seem to be something about the situation that she'd have in mind that she'd think counted in favor of pulling over if she were virtuous and well-informed (e.g., that the engine is overheating, that the cops are telling her to pull over, that she sees someone in need of assistance, etc.). We wouldn't think that it would be something about her or in her head. If we want to specify Agatha's reason for being upset, we'd say 'Agatha is upset that...' and fill in the dots by specifying something that she knew and wanted not to be.¹⁴ We would most naturally take this to be something about the situation that Agatha had in mind, not something in the head. Agatha could, of course, be upset that she believed James (e.g., if she wanted not to be so gullible or wanted not to look like a fool), but she could also be upset that James has once again shown himself to be unreliable (e.g., if she wanted James' help and had planned her day in the belief that he'd be there for her). If normative reasons that bear on whether to act are, say, facts about the situation and an agent's reasons for emoting are likewise facts about the situation, it would seem to follow that a subject's reasons for believing things *could* be facts about the situation, too. That's because it seems quite natural to think that someone could act and believe for the very same reason. It seems quite natural to think that Agatha's reason for being angry is also her reason for believing that James isn't a true friend. We could give these things up, of course, if the right kinds of philosophical pressures are applied, but I think we should wait to see whether there's any good philosophical reason to reject or reinterpret our ordinary ways of talking about a subject's reasons. Factualism seems like a good default view.

Davidson (2001: 141) defended a version of statism according to which only beliefs could be reasons for beliefs:

The Logical Relations Argument

- P1. If X is a reason for belief, it has to stand in some sort of logical relation to that belief.
- P2. While beliefs stand in logical relations to beliefs because of their content, experiences and sensations do not because they don't have propositional contents.
- C. If X is a reason for belief, it must be a belief.

If we say that beliefs are the only states of mind that have propositional content, it might seem that this kind of argument might work. It seems that if you have any reason to believe *p* it has to rule out *something* to support *p* and it seems that ruling out here has to be understood in logical terms. As Williamson (2000: 196) notes, evidence rules certain things out by being inconsistent with it.

Davidson's argument, if successful, spells trouble for our evidentialist because in cases of rational non-inferential belief (e.g., perceptual, introspective, or proprioceptive belief) our beliefs aren't based on further beliefs:

The Argument from Non-Inferential Rational Belief

¹³ For defenses of factualism, see Alvarez (2010), Gordon (1987), Hyman (2006), Leite (2012), Littlejohn (2012), McDowell (1997), Unger (1975), and Williamson (2000).

¹⁴ For discussions of reasons and emotions, see Gordon (1987), Tappolet (this volume), and Unger (1975).

P1. There are cases of rational non-inferential belief in which your rational belief is not supported by further beliefs.

P2. The only way for your belief to be supported by evidence is to be supported by further beliefs [Davidson's statist view].

C Your belief is not supported by evidence in cases of rational non-inferential belief.

P3. According to the evidentialist's Dependence Thesis, you only rationally believe something if your belief is based on evidence.

C2. The Dependence Thesis is mistaken.

The standard statist response is to reject the second premise of both arguments. For each non-inferential belief we rationally hold they'll claim that there is something that constitutes evidence for that belief that bears some logical relation to it.¹⁵ In the case of perceptual belief, for example, they'll say that our experiences stand in logical relations to our beliefs by virtue of having representational content. The mistake in Davidson's argument, they say, isn't a mistake about what epistemic reasons have to be like (i.e., things that stand in logical relations), but a mistake about the nature of perceptual experience (i.e., as being something that lacks content).¹⁶

This statist response faces a number of problems. First, it's controversial whether experiences have representational content at all, much less the kind of content that beliefs have.¹⁷ If they do not, it's hard to see how they could be evidence for a belief because they couldn't play a role in reasoning that's anything like the role that belief plays.

Second, even if perceptual experiences have representational content and Davidson's argument doesn't identify any interesting difference between belief and experience, it's not clear that we want to treat the case of introspective or proprioceptive knowledge on this model by saying that introspective and proprioceptive beliefs are rational because in addition to what's known via introspection (e.g., that you're in pain, that you're thinking about Pittsburgh, that you believe Anscombe smoked cigars) or proprioception (e.g., that your legs are crossed) and the relevant beliefs there's a representational state of mind that represents the relevant facts and has a content like belief.

Third, the logical relations argument, properly understood, might be used as an argument *against* statism. As we've seen, evidence can support some things by ruling

¹⁵ See Brueckner (2009) and Conee and Feldman (2008) for responses of this kind. Brewer (1999) and McDowell (1997) offer similar responses, arguing that experience has a kind of representational content that stands in logical relations to beliefs and trace Davidson's mistake to Davidson's conception of experience as something that lacks content. Neither author defended statism, however. As they saw it, experiences provide reasons for our beliefs without being those reasons. Ginsborg (2006) provides a helpful overview of this debate between Davidson and his critics.

¹⁶ For defense of such a view, see Siegel (2010). For recent criticism of the view that experiences have propositional contents, see Brewer (2011), Crane (2009), and Travis (2013). For a helpful overview of the debate, see Smithies (this volume).

¹⁷ Byrne (2005).

out others. It might seem that there is some sense in which Agnes' beliefs might rule out some things or support some other things, but such talk should be treated with care because of an important ambiguity in the way we talk about belief. Consider Agnes' belief about London. This might be a firm belief, a belief recently formed, and a belief that was caused by various psychological processes. Consider Agnes' belief about Austin. This might be a belief that's widely shared but something that I don't accept but fear to be the case. In talking this way about Agnes' belief about London, we're talking about belief as an *act*. In talking about Agnes' belief about Austin, we're talking about belief as an *object*. The *objects* of the *acts* stand in logical relations (i.e., it is the object of the act that stands in entailment relations and something that Frege thinks resides in the third realm). The acts, however, do not. What I fear and Agnes believes is that epistemologists will ignore Austin's work on excuses. This *proposition* stands in logical relations to other propositional objects of beliefs, but the acts do not. If evidence stands in logical relations, evidence is something you have in mind (i.e., a proposition or fact), not something in the head (i.e., an attitude towards a proposition or fact that could be firmly held, newly formed, and so on).

Perhaps the most influential argument for statism is the argument from error:

The Argument from Error

P1. For any good case in which a subject's perspective on the situation is accurate and she ϕ 's, in part, because it seems to her that p , there's a bad case involving this subject's non-factive mental duplicate in which this subject ϕ 's, in part, because it seems to her that p but p is not so.

P2. In the bad case, the subject's reason for ϕ -ing wouldn't be p , so it would have to be a state of mind (e.g., a belief, experience, intuition, or apparent memory).

P3. The subject won't ϕ for different reasons in the good case and the bad.

C. Thus, the subject's reason for ϕ -ing in the good would have to be a state of mind (e.g., a belief, experience, intuition, or apparent memory).

The argument rests on three controversial assumptions. The first is that that reason ascriptions are factive. The propositionalists reject this. They say that your reasons for ϕ -ing are the same in the good case and the bad because they're the propositions you have in mind and you have the same propositions in mind in both cases. The second assumption is an anti-disjunctivist assumption, which is that your reasons for ϕ -ing don't differ between the two cases. A disjunctivist about motivating reasons can say that while your reasons for ϕ -ing will always consist of facts you know, your reasons for ϕ -ing can differ in the good and bad case, in part, because you know different things in these cases.¹⁸ The third is that the good and bad cases are both cases in which the subject ϕ 's for a reason. If someone mistakenly believes p and is angry because they believe p , this (arguably) isn't a case in which someone is angry that p . In a similar vein, if someone acts or believes p because they mistakenly believe q , we can say that there are reasons why they believe p without saying that this is a case in which

¹⁸ See Hornsby (2007) for discussion.

something is the subject's reason for believing p .¹⁹

Notice that if we take the argument from error at face value, we're committed to the view that a subject's reason for ϕ -ing is always a state of mind. The reason is never a fact, much less one that doesn't supervene upon facts about the subject's non-factive mental states. While we might say that Agnes was upset that she lost her ball, we couldn't say that Agnes' reason for being upset was that she lost her ball. This is decidedly odd. Since statists have thus far done little to defend the controversial assumptions that underwrite the argument from error and since the implications of the argument seem so deeply implausible when it comes to claims about the ontology of reasons for emotion or normative reasons for action, the argument presents little motivation for statism.

Of the three leading views concerning the ontology of reasons, the factualist view seems the most plausible.²⁰ Suppose it's the correct view. If reasons are facts, it looks like knowledge is necessary for possessing such reasons. Linguistic considerations support this hypothesis. As Unger (1975) notes, we cannot consistently assert claims of the form, 'S ϕ 'd for the reason that p ' or 'S's reason for ϕ -ing was that p ' while adding that 'S doesn't know that p '. Philosophical considerations also support this view. If your connection to p is too accidental, we wouldn't think p is what guided you in your thought or action. The fact that Obama won reelection couldn't be Agnes' reason for deciding to call her mother if Agnes had been spending her time in Nozick's experience machine and it was just a fluke occurrence that events in the world coincided with what was happening in that lab because the connection is too accidental.²¹ If your connection to p doesn't involve belief, we wouldn't think p is what guided you in your thought or action, not if p 's being your reason for ϕ -ing depends upon whether, by your lights, p shows ϕ -ing in a favorable light. Even if we could stand in, say, a purely perceptual relation to the fact that p and so stand in a non-accidental relation to a fact without believing the fact to obtain, *that* relation couldn't be a relation in which you come to have p as your reason. Suppose you stand in the perceptual relation to the fact but don't believe p . By your lights, p couldn't show you that ϕ -ing has any feature that makes it appropriate or fitting if you're agnostic about whether p or committed to $\sim p$.²² If, by your lights, p shows you anything about anything at all, you would have to be committed to p in a way that's sufficient for you to count as a believer. Possessing p as a reason requires that you believe p , p is true,

¹⁹ See Alvarez (2010) and Littlejohn (2012) for discussion. If you accept Gordon's (1987) or Unger's (1975) points about reason-ascriptions and knowledge-ascriptions, the correct response to the argument from error is either this view or Hornsby's disjunctivist view.

²⁰ For further discussion of the case for and against factualism, see Hawthorne and Magidor (this volume).

²¹ A point defended by Hyman (1999) and Littlejohn (2012).

²² Think about whether you can be sad that your friend has passed away if you see various events or people but don't believe that your friend has passed away. Think about whether it's sensible to say, 'Agatha is happy that the liberals are ahead in the polls but she doesn't believe that they are'. If belief is required to respond practically or affectively to the fact that p , shouldn't it be required to respond doxastically to the fact that p ?

and you're connected to the fact that p in a non-accidental way. That should be sufficient for knowledge.

Does the converse hold? If you know p , is p something you possess as a reason? It seems so. What you know is in the right general category to be a reason. If possession implies something like being in a position to be guided by it in your beliefs, actions, or emotions, it looks like knowledge suffices for that. If possession implies something like the authority to treat p as if it's a reason for believing, doing, or feeling things, knowledge implies that, too.²³

These considerations support this equation:

E=K: Your evidence includes p iff you know p .²⁴

If E=K is correct, the evidentialist's problems with non-inferential belief arise anew. According to evidentialism, rational beliefs are rational because you have evidence that supports them and the possession of this evidence doesn't depend upon whether you have these rational beliefs. If you know non-inferentially, say, that your legs are crossed, E=K implies that there's nothing that could have been your reason for believing that your legs were crossed.²⁵ According to Dependence, your non-inferential belief *couldn't* be rational because it couldn't be based on evidence that would make it rational to form it in the first place. Since we have non-inferential knowledge, Priority turns out to be mistaken, too. We cannot understand the possession of reasons in non-normative terms.²⁶ Thus, while the evidentialists maintain that beliefs attain positive epistemic standing because of the evidence you possess for them, this grounding thesis (arguably) gets things backwards. We possess evidence because our beliefs attain a kind of positive epistemic standing by virtue of the fact that they constitute knowledge. The non-inferential case shows that reasons are often the *result* of forming beliefs that attain epistemic status, which means that reasons are not invariably *the means by which* all beliefs attain status. If E=K is correct, it makes as much sense to say that evidence is the means by which all knowledge is

²³ All knowledge? Bird (2004) provides a powerful argument for thinking that even inferential knowledge is part of your evidence. Suppose you know q via inductive inference and subsequently forget your initial reasons for believing q . In this state where you remember that q but not your original grounds for q , q could be your reason for feeling, believing, or doing something. Thus, q could be among the reasons you possess even if it's known inferentially.

²⁴ E=K is defended by Hyman (2006) and Williamson (2000). Some critics attack the idea that knowledge is propositional. See the statist papers listed above. See Dougherty (2011) and Neta (2008) for responses. We have seen that some reject the idea that reasons have to be truths, but see Unger (1975) and Littlejohn (2012) for defenses of the truth-requirement. For a helpful discussion of the debate surrounding E=K, see McGlynn (2014).

²⁵ McGinn (2012) provides a helpful discussion of whether there is anything that's your reason for believing p when your belief about p is non-inferential. A potential objection here is that your reason for believing p could be p . The trouble with this idea is that it would require (a) possessing p as part of your evidence and (b) being convinced by p that something is so. We couldn't satisfy (a) unless p was believed. For (b) to be met, you'd have to be convinced to believe p by what you believed about p .

²⁶ For defenses of normative approaches to the possession of reasons the defenses of E=K, Littlejohn (2012), and Sosa and Sylvan (this volume).

acquired as it does to say that knowledge is the means by which all knowledge is acquired.²⁷

Our evidentialists try to explain why rationality supervenes upon the mental (i.e., RSM) by claiming that rationality supervenes upon the evidence, which in turn supervenes upon the mental (i.e., RSE and ESM). If E=K is correct, ESM is deeply implausible. The only way to preserve ESM is to insist that you could never know anything about anything that doesn't supervene upon your non-factive mental states.

As for RSE, RSE is compatible with E=K, but the combination is odd. If you know that you have hands, you have entailing evidence for the proposition that there is at least one pair of hands within a kilometer of your current location. Your systematically deceived counterpart thinks that it has the same evidence, but it doesn't have the same evidence as it's deceived by a Cartesian demon. According to RSM, you and your counterpart are equally rational in your beliefs in spite of this striking difference between your evidence. If your model of *ex ante* rationality is in terms of strength of evidential support, it will be quite difficult to explain why you and your deceived counterparts would only be rational in having the same degree of confidence in the hypotheses you consider when there is this significant difference in terms of how well your respective bodies of evidence support these hypotheses.²⁸

Let's revisit the reasons-evidence identification thesis (REI). The classic objection to REI is that practical considerations might be reasons to believe *p*.²⁹ It might be good for you, say, to believe God exists even if there's no evidence that supports this hypothesis. A standard response to this is to say that such practical considerations are the wrong kind of thing to bear on the rationality or acceptability of believing a proposition. Shah (2006) argues that such practical reasons cannot be normative reasons or reasons to believe a proposition because it's a general constraint on normative reasons that they *can* figure in reasoning. We cannot reason from practical considerations to the conclusion that something is so.³⁰

This point, even if correct, doesn't establish REI. First, error-theorists about epistemic reasons say that there aren't any normative reasons to believe propositions.³¹ If they understand evidence and evidential support non-normatively, they can consistently talk about evidence and yet deny the reality of normative reasons. Second, Shah's argument only concerns reasons to believe. REI pertains to all reasons that bear on whether to believe *p*. The former are a special case of the latter. To see this, suppose belief is governed by this norm:

EN: You should not believe *p* without sufficient evidence.³²

²⁷ Does this mean that perception isn't a source of reasons or evidence? No, it tells us that perception is a source of reasons or evidence because it's a source of knowledge.

²⁸ Silins (2005) discusses this problem, but presents it as a problem for E=K.

²⁹ See Reisner (this volume) for further discussion of the possibility of such reasons.

³⁰ For further discussion of the possibility of practical considerations motivating belief, see Adler (2002) and Hieronymi (2006).

³¹ See Olson (2011) for further discussion.

³² I do not endorse the view that belief is governed by this norm. The norm is just used for illustrative purposes. Certain cases of non-inferential knowledge are (arguably) cases in which a belief is both appropriate and not based on evidence. If we read EN as saying that it would never be appropriate to believe something unless that belief is

If Shah's argument is sound, it rules out the possibility of practical reasons to believe p . If you think that EN governs belief, however, you would think that there's a decisive reason to refrain from believing p when you don't have sufficient evidence.³³ This reason is not a further piece of evidence, but it's a reason that bears on whether to believe p .³⁴ Evidentialists should reject the idea that there are practical considerations that constitute reasons to believe, but they (and everyone else who thinks EN governs belief) should also reject REI and the idea that all normative reasons consist of evidence. If there are norms like EN that govern belief, we should recognize the distinction between evidential-reasons from norm-reasons.³⁵ The former are pieces of evidence and the latter are provided by norms like EN. Shah's argument doesn't establish REI because it doesn't say anything about norm-reasons.³⁶

3. Structural Sufficiency and a Puzzle about Rationality

Recall the evidentialist's thesis of Structural Sufficiency. It says that if it's rational to believe p , it's rational because the evidence provides the right kind of support. A natural way of understanding that is in terms of sufficient strength. We often speak as if there's a way of measuring the support a body of evidence provides for a proposition when we talk about, say, a single body of evidence providing stronger support for p than q or p receiving stronger support from this body of evidence than it receives from that one. If Structural Sufficiency is correct, every plausible view of epistemic rationality will say that there should be some non-maximal level of support that's sufficiently strong to guarantee that it's rational to believe a proposition.³⁷

based on sufficient evidence, such cases might show that EN is false. See Anscombe (1962), Brueckner (2009), and McGinn (2012) for discussion of some such cases.

³³ In discussion some people have suggested that norm-reasons are defeaters. We might say that they are, but they are different to the defeaters that we're all familiar with. Typically, defeaters are just evidential-reasons that the subject possesses that weaken the evidential support a proposition receives. These aren't like that. Their presence or absence doesn't go towards determining the total strength of support a body of evidence provides for a proposition. Arguably, they bear on whether to believe even if the subject is non-culpably ignorant of them. People typically think that you have to be aware of defeaters in some sense if they're going to defeat justification or rationality. See Lord (this volume) for further discussion of defeating reasons.

³⁴ Such reasons receive too little discussion in the literature, but if you think 'ought' implies 'reason' and think that there are norms that govern belief, you should recognize such reasons. See Gibbons (2014), Littlejohn (2012), and Owens (2000) for discussion of norm-reasons. One important difference between evidential-reasons and norm-reasons is that it seems that the former cannot do their work unless you have some sort of access to them. The latter might manage to do their work even if you don't have access to them. This point is widely neglected, but it has importance for the debates between the internalists and externalists about justification.

³⁵ For further discussion of the relationship between reasons, evidence, and ought, see Broome (this volume), Brunero (this volume), Hawthorne and Magidor (this volume), Kearns and Star (2008, 2009), and Raz (1975).

³⁶ This is not a criticism of Shah's argument. He didn't intend to show that all reasons consist of evidence.

³⁷ The threshold could be variable, but this won't affect the argument.

Consider the recent debates about the rationality of believing lottery propositions (i.e. propositions about whether a particular ticket for an upcoming fair lottery will lose) on the basis of the odds of a ticket losing.³⁸ This kind of debate seems like the kind of debate where parties to this debate might disagree without being anything less than fully rational. It seems quite plausible, for example, that you have sufficient evidence to believe L:

L: Rationality requires you to believe lottery propositions.

If so, most epistemologists would agree that:

(1) It's rational for you to believe L.

Suppose you do rationally believe (1). Is it rational to believe that your ticket will lose (=p)? If (1) is true, it seems so:

(2) You rationally believe that it's rationally required for you to believe p.

If so, it certainly seems that believing $\sim p$ wouldn't be rational and suspending on whether p won't be rational, in which case:

(3) You're in a situation in which you're rationally required to believe p.

Here's the turn. I haven't told you whether L is true. We're working under the assumption that your evidence provides strong support for L and that seems to be compatible with the further claim that L is false, in which case we'd have this:

(4) Because L is false, you're not in a situation in which you're rationally required to believe p. In fact, you are in a situation in which rationality prohibits believing p.

On the assumption that rationality won't require and prohibit the same option, (4) is incompatible with (3). We have a puzzle on our hands.³⁹

Consider three responses to the puzzle. The *perspectivist* thinks that if you have the right sort of beliefs, intuitions, testimonial inputs, etc., everything available to you might support L.⁴⁰ Once you rationally believe L and rationally believe that rationality requires you to believe lottery propositions, it just follows that rationality permits you to believe lottery propositions. The perspectivists reject (4) because they maintain that the features of your perspective that make it rational to believe L make it rational to believe in accordance with this belief.

The *incoherentist* thinks that if your evidence is supports L, it might be rational to believe L.⁴¹ On this view, your evidence might provide sufficient support for L even if it didn't provide sufficient support for believing lottery propositions. Thus, you can find yourself in a situation in which rationality permits a kind of mismatch: you rationally believe that rationality requires belief in lottery propositions and you are not rationally permitted to believe lottery propositions. As they see it, (1) and (4) could be correct, so they reject (3).

The *objectivist* thinks that when we're setting up the puzzle we could stipulate that L is correct, in which case we shouldn't reject (4). The objectivist thinks that the incoherentist view is problematic because it classifies certain sets of attitudes that strike some of us as incoherent as nevertheless being rationally acceptable. In

³⁸ See Hawthorne (2004) and Nelkin (2000) for discussion of L.

³⁹ For further discussion of this puzzle, see Littlejohn (forthcoming).

⁴⁰ Perspectivists include (possibly) Feldman (2005), Foley (2001), and Gibbons (2014).

⁴¹ Coates (2012) and Lasonen-Aarnio (MS) defend incoherentist views.

rejecting the incoherentist view, the objectivists propose that our beliefs about the requirements of rationality can only themselves be rational if they are accurate:

Fixed Point Thesis (FPT): No situation rationally permits an *a priori* false belief about which overall states are rationally forbidden in that situation.⁴²

The objectivist accept (3) and (4) and so reject (1) and (2). Not only does the rationality of believing lottery propositions depend upon whether L is an objective rational requirement, the rationality of higher-order beliefs about rationality depends upon whether L is an objective rational requirement. To solve our puzzle, we have to choose a view.

Perspectivists insist that their view is the only view that vindicates the idea that the rationality of a thinker's beliefs depends upon her perspective. If a thinker's evidence supports L and careful reflection has turned up no reason to doubt it, it seems that believing L is preferable to suspension and disbelief. If a thinker is led to accept L because her evidence supports this and then considers whether her ticket will lose, it seems that it wouldn't be rational for her to suspend or believe that her ticket will win, so it seems that believing that her ticket will lose is the best of these three options.

On this way of thinking about things, it might not ever be possible for a thinker rationally but mistakenly believe that she's required to believe *p*, so it might seem that this view is compatible with something like FPT. Notice, however, that this seems to allow that there might be two thinkers with different evidence who are required to take different attitudes towards lottery propositions. Just as the perspectivist view allows that there might be thinkers who rationally believe that rationality requires believing lottery propositions, it also allows that there might be different thinkers who rationally believe that rationality requires them to suspend judgment on lottery propositions. Thus, the view seems to imply that the rational status of a thinker's beliefs about a lottery ticket can depend, in part, upon their evidence that concerns L. It thus implies that L could not be true in full generality. In turn, we might wonder whether there could be any norms like L that applied to all thinkers. The difficulties that arise for L could arise for other putative norms, such as those that tell us what to do in cases of disagreement, say, or what to do when we discover inconsistencies in our sets of belief. If it turns out that there is no categorical requirement on all thinkers regardless of their perspectives on the putative requirements to, say, be conciliatory in the face of peer disagreement or maintain consistent sets of beliefs, it might start to look as if there aren't many fixed requirements of rationality. This might in turn lead to a kind of anarchist view of epistemic norms, a view on which there are no norms that identify non-normative conditions under which rationality requires all thinkers to believe, suspend, or disbelieve. While the perspectivist view might not violate the FPT, it might be misleading to describe the view as one that recognizes fixed-points.

The incoherentist might suggest that there is at least one epistemic norm, one that enjoins us to fit our beliefs to the evidence. If we think that the facts about what rationality requires with respect to our first-order attitudes depends entirely only upon whether there is sufficient first-order evidence for these attitudes, the view might allow that it would be rational for thinkers to take different views towards L depending upon

⁴² Titelbaum (2015). Gibbons (2014), Greco (2014), Littlejohn (2012), and Smithies (2012) defend similar principles for rationality and/or justification in that they defend the view that if you justifiably/rationally believe that it's justified/rational to believe *p*, it is.

whether their views about L fit their evidence. They would insist, however, that the truth or falsity of L has nothing to do with a thinker's evidence concerning L and insist that the truth or falsity of L will determine whether a thinker can rationally believe lottery propositions or not. Consider an analogy. There might be lawyers who reasonably disagree about whether it was legal for their clients to take some deductions on their taxes, but these rational beliefs about the requirements of the law do not help to determine whether their clients' deductions were legally permitted. Just as it might be possible to violate the law while reasonably believing that your actions are legal, perhaps it is possible that rationality requires you to suspend judgment on lottery propositions even if you happen to rationally believe that rationality actually compels you to believe them.

The main difficulty that this view faces is that it conflicts with the idea that rationality requires us avoid epistemic akrasia (i.e., to avoid believing p while believing that this belief is rationally prohibited or believing that the belief in p is rationally required while failing to hold that belief). If rationality does require us to avoid epistemic akrasia, it requires us to see to it that our first-order beliefs and certain second-order beliefs about them mesh.

The requirement to avoid epistemic akrasia provides us with the beginnings of an argument for the objectivist view. If we assume that rationality requires us to avoid being epistemically akratic, we can establish FPT. If we also assume that there are fixed requirements of rationality (e.g., L?) that apply to all thinkers regardless of what evidence they have and regardless of how things seem to them, we have our argument for the objectivist view.

How does this bear on the thesis of Structural Sufficiency? If, as seems plausible, it is possible for two thinkers to have equally strong evidence concerning L where the evidence that these thinkers have support incompatible positions regarding L, the objectivist would say that while it might be rational for the thinker with the correct view to believe on her evidence, it couldn't be rational for the thinker with the incorrect view about L to believe on her evidence.⁴³ By hypothesis, these thinkers had evidence that provided equally strong support for their respective positions, so it turns out that the presence of this support wasn't sufficient to ensure that it would be rational for *both* thinkers. Thus, if we think of sufficient support or the right kind of support is understood in terms of sufficient *strength* of support, it turns out that Structural Sufficiency is false. To reconcile Structural Sufficiency with the objectivist view, we would either have to argue that it is impossible for thinkers to have misleading evidence about the requirements of rationality or we would need to offer some alternative account of what it takes for a body of evidence to provide the right kind of support for a belief.

⁴³ It is unclear that all who accept FPT would accept this. It looks as if Smithies (2012) and Titelbaum (2015) are sympathetic to the idea that we all have evidence that supports the right views about what rationality requires of us. On this view, it is difficult to see how it could be reasonable for someone who initially accepts the right view concerning L to suspend judgment on whether L is true or decrease her confidence in L by acquiring new evidence since the natural way of understanding their view is that all of have evidence that provides maximal support for the truths about the requirements of rationality regardless of what is contained in our body of evidence.

4. On Reasons and Rationality

According to evidentialism, reasons (which they might take to be pieces of evidence) and rationality are intimately related:

RR1: It's rational to ϕ iff the reasons provide sufficiently strong support.

We have just seen that there is a *prima facie* plausible objectivist argument against RR1. If someone were to try make a minor modification to RR1, they might try this:

RR2: It's rational to ϕ iff ϕ -ing is the correct response to the reasons.

If correctness is understood as something like fittingness, we can say that the fitting response to reasons isn't to be understood in terms of believing just anything we have strong evidential support for. RR2 might be attractive to people who think that fundamental role that reasons play is that of making things reasonable or rational.⁴⁴

Challenges remain:

Rationality without reasons (a): Agnes knows p non-inferentially and there's nothing that is Agnes' reason for believing p .

Rationality without reasons (b): Adella's fish contains salmonella, so there's a good reason for her not to eat it and not to believe she should eat it. She doesn't know about the salmonella however so her belief that she should eat it and her subsequent action are both rational.⁴⁵

Reasons without rationality: The building is on fire, so there's good reason to jump. Agatha doesn't know that the building is on fire, so they can't make it rational for her to leap from her window.⁴⁶

Some think there is an easy fix. Perhaps rationality can be understood in terms of the correct response to reasons that get through an epistemic filter by being known or justifiably believed:

RR3: Necessarily, it's rational for you to ϕ iff you'd respond correctly to the possessed reasons by ϕ -ing.⁴⁷

RR3 might handle the second kind of (alleged) case of rationality without reasons, but not the first. It's also difficult to see how it could deal with cases involving apparent conflicts between apparent reasons and possessed reasons. Suppose Audrey knows that she's promised to meet a friend and knows that a baby is in danger of drowning. She knows that should save the baby even if that means missing the meeting. Maddy is Audrey's non-factive mental duplicate. It looks to her that there's a baby to save, but there isn't. She knows she has a lunch appointment. The rational thing for Maddy to

⁴⁴ See Gibbons (2014). If you think that it's not invariably right to ϕ when it's rational to ϕ , you might reject this view on the grounds that reasons determine whether something is appropriate or permitted.

⁴⁵ Broome (2007, 2013) uses examples like this to criticize RR2.

⁴⁶ Parfit's (1997) example.

⁴⁷ See Lord (2014).

do is to try to save a baby. If she did this, she wouldn't be acting on the stronger possessed reason because she'd be acting against a genuine reason on a merely apparent reason.

These proposals all assume that rationality consists in responding to reasons (presumably understood as pieces of evidence), so they'll struggle to handle cases of rational non-inferential belief if such beliefs are not based on evidence. Consider a different approach, one that proposes a connection between rationality, norms that govern belief, and there reasons there are to conform to such norms (i.e., norm-reasons):

RR₄: Necessarily, it's rational to ϕ iff you can ϕ while conforming to the norm-reasons that apply to you.

The idea is that there is an epistemic norm that governs belief that determine whether it's appropriate to believe and a belief is rational iff it doesn't violate such norms. These are the leading candidate norms in the literature:

EN: You must not believe p unless you have sufficient evidence.⁴⁸

TN: You must not believe p unless p is true.⁴⁹

KN: You must not believe p unless you know p .⁵⁰

If any of these norms is genuine, there is a reason that applies to all thinkers that is a reason not to form beliefs that violate these norms. (Note that proponents of RR₄ would say that this reason bears on whether a thinker should form a belief even if that thinker isn't aware that these norms are norms and even if the thinker isn't in a position to see what these norms require from her.)

To test RR₄, we'd have to consider whether it's possible to be rational in holding a belief while violating such (putative) norms and whether you can satisfy them and still be irrational. Some of these substantive views about norms do not fit well with RR₄. If we combine EN with RR₄, it looks like we still face the problem of rational non-inferential belief. If we combine TN with RR₄, we get the result that it's

⁴⁸ The fundamental norm according to Conee and Feldman (2004). Some authors have also proposed justified belief norms, but there seems to be radical disagreement about how these norms should be understood. Some authors defend these norms and do so only because they think that some orthodox account of justified belief is correct. Some authors defend these norms because they think that it is trivial that the justification property is the property that attaches to a belief iff it satisfies the norms that govern belief and then go on to argue that norms like KN or TN are among the norms that govern belief. Because of this, I thought it might be best not to suggest that a justification norm is an interesting alternative to these norms. For arguments that satisfying the justification norm requires satisfying TN, see Littlejohn (2012) and Williamson (forthcoming).

⁴⁹ The truth norm is the fundamental norm according to Boghossian (2008), Wedgwood (2007), and Whiting (2014), but a derivative norm according to the defenders of KN.

⁵⁰ The fundamental norm according to Adler (2002), Littlejohn (2014), Steglich-Petersen (2014), Sutton (2007), and Williamson (2000). One advantage that KN has over TN is that it explains why epistemic assessment is inward looking and why it should be concerned with things like whether you have the right kind of evidence for believing true propositions.

rational to believe some Moorean absurdities (e.g., that p is true, but nobody knows that it is or that p is true even though nobody has any evidence that supports p) and we get the unfortunate result that only true beliefs are rational.⁵¹ KN seems to avoid these difficulties but when combined with RR4 it implies implausibly that it would be irrational to believe p if one were in a Gettier case or if one had a mistaken belief.

We can avoid these worries by combining this account with KN:

RR5: Necessarily, it's rational to ϕ iff it's possible that a non-factive mental duplicate of yours ϕ 'd without failing to conform to the norm-reasons.⁵²

KN sets a standard, one that determines whether you should believe p . If you conform to KN, you satisfy the right-hand side of RR5 because you are the same on the inside as you are. If, however, you believe p without conforming to KN, you would satisfy the right-hand side iff it's possible for one of your non-factive duplicates to know p . If they could know p , it looks as if your failure to know doesn't have anything to do with the way that you've exercised your rational faculties. When you fail to conform to KN because of how you've exercised your rational faculties, it seems fair to say that your beliefs are less than fully rational. If, however, you don't fail to conform to KN because of how you've exercised your rational faculties, it seems only fair to say that you've shown yourself to be excellent in the way you exercise those faculties and that you haven't failed to understand what the reasons require of someone in your situation. As a result, your resulting belief is rational.

This approach fits nicely with objectivism. Mistaken higher-order beliefs about what rationality requires in a situation is a commitment to mishandling reasons and counts as irrational on objectivism. Such mistaken beliefs about rational requirements could not constitute knowledge, so subjects who form such beliefs cannot be the same on the inside as someone who knows what rationality requires of them. The approach also fits nicely with the idea that rationality doesn't require us to always believe on the basis of evidence. If you can know p straight off, it's rational to believe p without believing it on the basis of evidence. What matters is whether you'd believe p in a way that *could* result in coming to know p . Believing that your legs are crossed on the basis of proprioception is a way of coming to know that your legs are crossed, so you count as rational if you believe this without evidence. Believing that the number of stars is even or that your ticket is a loser on the basis of your present evidence isn't a way of coming to know these things, so these beliefs don't count as rational.

One possibility to consider is that RR5 should be embedded in a virtue-theoretic framework. Perhaps a virtue-theoretic framework will serve as a worthy rival to the evidentialist framework that's served as a foil throughout this discussion. The reason why rationality is linked to the subject's mental states *isn't*, as some evidentialists suggest, that the subject's mental states constitute reasons to believe things. The reason RSM is correct is that we can determine whether the subject's beliefs manifest their competence by looking at a subject's mental states, her beliefs, and comparing these states to those of an epistemically virtuous subject, one that

⁵¹ For arguments that you cannot rationally believe Moorean absurdities and discussions of the significance of this fact, see Adler (2002) and Sorensen (1988).

⁵² Similar to proposals by Bird (2007), Ichikawa (2014), and Smithies (2012b). For critical discussion, see McGlynn (2012).

assumes responsibility for her beliefs and understands how to handle the demands that the reasons place upon her.

5. Rationality, Reasons, Justification, and Knowledge

How are rationality and reasons related to other epistemic notions, such as justification or knowledge? Rationality typically depends upon how things look from your perspective and doesn't typically require accuracy. Thus, rationality doesn't require knowledge. Is it possible to know p without rationally believing p ? This is a difficult question, one that bears on an important question about the normativity of rationality.⁵³ Suppose you accept RR5 and think that knowledge is the norm of belief. If so, knowledge requires rationality. Anyone who knows p is the same on the inside as someone who knows p . According to RR5 and KN, anyone who knows p rationally believes p .⁵⁴ In this framework, there's always a reason not to irrationally believe something as irrationally believing something is one way of believing against a norm-reason.

How are knowledge and reasons related? The view that a belief about p constitutes knowledge iff it's true and supported by evidential-reasons fell out of favor because of Gettier's (1963) cases. You can't know that p when your belief about p is only accidentally correct.⁵⁵ If KN is the norm of belief, there's this link between knowledge and reasons: there is always a norm-reason not to believe what you don't know. There's a further link between knowledge and reasons. It's arguably the case that knowledge is a way to be related to some facts such that they can guide you and serve as your reasons. Arguably, it's the only way that you can be guided by such facts as reasons.

Some people think that your belief about p cannot be justified unless it conforms to the norms that govern belief.⁵⁶ On this way of thinking about justification if KN is the norm that governs belief, there might be rational beliefs that fail to constitute knowledge, but all justified beliefs would constitute knowledge. On such an approach, rationality differs from justification because only one status requires conformity to norm-reasons. On this approach justification isn't simply a function of support from evidential-reasons. If knowledge suffices for rationality and justification and knowledge doesn't invariably require support from evidential-reasons, justification doesn't invariably require support from such reasons. Even when the evidential-reasons provide strong support, FPT tells us that justification and rationality don't just consist in the presence of such support.

If justification requires conforming to norm-reasons and rationality doesn't, justification differs from rationality. It might be that all justified beliefs are rational beliefs, but some rational beliefs won't be justified. Some epistemologists maintain that rational beliefs differ from justified beliefs in that rationality is required for certain kinds of excuses.⁵⁷ While excuses are needed when norms are violated without

⁵³ See Broome (2013), Kolodny (2005), and Way (this volume) for further discussion of the normativity of rationality.

⁵⁴ For arguments that knowledge doesn't require rationality, see Audi (2001), Foley (2012), and Lasonen-Aarnio (2010).

⁵⁵ See Engel (1992), Pritchard (2005), and Unger (1968) for discussion.

⁵⁶ See Littlejohn (2012), Sutton (2007), and Williamson (2013).

⁵⁷ See Gardner (2007) for discussion of the justification-excuse distinction.

sufficient reason, justifications show that no norm was violated without sufficient reason. Rationality thus differs from justification and knowledge. Perhaps it's normative in the sense that rational people shouldn't believe irrational things, but it doesn't follow that perfectly rational beliefs conform to the norms that govern them. It's clear that perfect rationality in the practical domain isn't any guarantee that you'll invariably do the right thing. If justified beliefs are, *inter alia*, beliefs that can justifiably figure in deliberation, perfect rationality in the theoretical domain isn't any guarantee that you'll conform to the norms that govern belief.⁵⁸

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⁵⁸ For arguments about whether the justificatory status of a belief is linked to the propriety of including that belief in practical and theoretical deliberation, see Brown (2008), Gibbons (2014), Hawthorne and Stanley (2008), Littlejohn (2012, 2014), Locke (2015), and Stanley (this volume).

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