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Responsibility for Rationality: Foundations of an Ethics of Mind

Abstract. How can we be responsible for our attitudes if we cannot normally choose what we believe, desire, feel, and intend? This problem has received much attention during the last decades, both in epistemology and ethics. Yet its connections to discussions about reasons and rationality have been largely overlooked. This book develops the foundations of an ethics of mind by investigating the responsibility that is presupposed by the requirements of rationality that govern our attitudes. It has five main goals. First, it reinterprets the problem of responsibility for attitudes as a problem about the normativity of rationality. Second, it connects substantive and structural rationality by drawing on debates about responsibility. Third, it supports recent accounts of the normativity of rationality by explicitly defending the view that epistemic reasons and other ‘right-kind’ reasons are genuine normative reasons. Fourth, it breaks the stalemate between rationalist and voluntarist accounts of mental responsibility by proposing a hybrid view. Finally, it argues that irrationality can warrant moral blame, thus revealing an unnoticed normative force of rational requirements. *Length of manuscript: 85,000 words*

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1. Motivation

We take each other to be responsible for our attitudes in a similar way as we take each other to be responsible for our actions. We think that we *ought* to believe in human-induced climate change, and we even consider it to be appropriate to criticize others if they fail to believe in it. A malicious desire, like the desire for another's suffering, can rightly provoke not only disapproval, but also resentment or indignation. An emotion like anger might turn out to be unjustified, and we might owe an apology to the person who was the target of our hostile emotion. And merely *intending* to become a better person is often already worthy of praise or credit.

Yet our practice of holding each other responsible for our attitudes can become puzzling upon reflection. Attitudes are not themselves exercises of voluntary control – mental states are nothing we, strictly speaking, *do*. They are not actions, but states. It seems that we cannot *choose* what we believe or feel. Yet, according to a widespread assumption, we are only responsible for what is within the scope of our voluntary control. According to Descartes,

only one thing in us [...] could give us good reason for esteeming ourselves, namely the exercise of our free will and the control we have over our volitions. For we can reasonably be praised or blamed only for actions that depend upon this free will (1649, art. 152).

If Descartes is right, then how can we be responsible for our attitudes?

Here is a common response. Intuitively, we are not responsible for just *being* in a state – at most, we are responsible for causing a state or for failing to avoid it. For instance, we are not responsible for just *having* a headache. Nevertheless, we can control our headaches by taking painkillers, and this ability to indirectly control our headaches can explain why we are sometimes responsible for them. Similarly, we can often control our beliefs indirectly by engaging in inquiry, our emotions by going for a walk, and our desires and intentions by actively deliberating about what is good and right. It thus seems that responsibility for attitudes can be derived from the responsibility for actions and omissions which had some foreseeable influence on our attitudes: since attitudes are states, we can only be responsible for them indirectly – that is, we can only be responsible for them *in virtue of* being responsible for actions and omissions. For only the latter are things over which we exercise direct voluntary control.¹

Recently, this common response has fallen into disrepute.² For it presents our attitudes as something *external* to us – as something for which we are only responsible indirectly, in the way we are responsible for the state of our apartment, for the behavior of our dog, or for suffering pain. However, we often hold our attitudes *for reasons*, and sometimes we are criticizable for not complying with our reasons for attitudes – say, for failing to believe what our evidence supports. This suggests that our responsibility for attitudes must be as direct as the responsibility for our actions. Yet how can this be if attitudes are states, and all control over states is indirect? Call this *the problem of mental responsibility*.

¹ For elaborated defenses of this kind of *indirect voluntarist* account of responsibility for attitudes, see Meylan (2013; 2017) and Peels (2017) on doxastic responsibility, Oakley (1992) on emotional responsibility, and Jacobs (2001) on responsibility for character. See also Rosen's (2004) view that blameworthiness always originates in *akratic* action, and Fischer and Tognazzini's (2009) view on tracing back all responsibility to voluntary action.

² This is mainly due to the *rationalist* accounts of responsibility for attitudes that oppose the views mentioned in the last footnote; see Owens (2000; 2017: intro.), Smith (2005), Hieronymi (2006; 2008; 2014), McHugh (2013; 2014; 2017), McCormick (2015), Roberts (2015), Portmore (2019), White (2019), Schmidt (2020b; 2024b), and Osborne (2021). Adams (1985) and Montmarquet (1993) are earlier opponents of indirect voluntarist accounts.

2. The Project

This section describes the project of *Responsibility for Rationality*, which develops a solution to the philosophical problem just outlined. I first summarize its relevance for current debates. I then sketch the main argument of the book, summarize its main claims and present the book's structure. Finally, I comment on its aimed readership.

2.1 Relevance and contribution to the literature

In the last twenty years, research on the rationality of attitudes and on responsibility for attitudes has developed into independent specialized debates. Since both strands of research are concerned with the normative dimensions of *attitudes*, we would expect the debates to be relevant to each other. Yet they are conducted in isolation. *Responsibility for Rationality* is an attempt to change this. It is the first book that brings together both recent debates in a unifying dialectic.

If rationality is more than just 'a pretty pattern of mental states'³ – that is, if rationality places genuine normative requirements on us to believe, desire, intend, and feel certain things⁴ – then we surely must be responsible for complying with rational requirements. Yet if we cannot normally choose our attitudes, then responsibility for rationality is *prima facie* puzzling. The question of how we *control* our attitudes has already received plenty of attention.⁵ The present book therefore takes a different approach: it considers how our direct responsibility for (ir)rational attitudes is revealed in our blaming practices. In doing so, the book

- develops the foundations of an ethics of mind by showing how direct responsibility for attitudes *and* the normativity of rationality are revealed in our blaming practices,
- defends a close connection between a kind of structural rationality and substantive rationality, according to which the latter implies the former,
- offers an original defense of the normativity of epistemic reasons for belief and of other 'right-kind' reasons for attitudes⁶ – a recently hot topic in epistemology and normative theory on which any recent defense of the normativity of rationality depends, and,
- proposes an original hybrid view of responsibility for attitudes, according to which we are directly responsible for our attitudes in a *robust* sense, while still acknowledging that indirect control over our mind is highly relevant for our blaming practices,
- finally, defends the view that irrationality can warrant moral blame.

Responsibility for Rationality is motivated by debates within meta-epistemology. It focuses on these debates especially in the central chapters 4 and 5. Yet it goes beyond these debates by developing the foundations for an ethics of mind. Its contribution to epistemology is therefore comparable to my previous co-edited volume in the Routledge Studies in Epistemology series, *The Ethics of Belief and Beyond* (Schmidt and Ernst 2020). The core idea of each book is that there are parallels between belief and other attitudes (like desire, emotion, and intention), especially when it comes to reasons and responsibility.

³ The phrase is from Wedgwood (2017). It is *prima facie* difficult to see why rationality is normative if, as defended by Broome (2013), rationality consists in holding coherent attitudes (see Kolodny 2005 and Kiesewetter 2017).

⁴ As recent proponents in the debate have extensively argued; see Kiesewetter (2017), Lord (2018), and Wedgwood (2017; forthcoming). See also Worsnip's (2021) recent argument that structural rationality is normative.

⁵ See, e.g., Hieronymi (2006; 2009; 2014), McCormick (2015), Meylan (2013; 2017), Peels (2017), Smith (2005).

⁶ On the distinction between right-kind and wrong-kind reasons, see Gertken and Kiesewetter (2017).

Responsibility for Rationality thus continues my project of connecting epistemology with broader normative theory. Discussions about mental normativity are scattered throughout various debates.⁷ By bringing some of these debates together, the book makes a unique contribution to the current research within normative theory at the intersection of epistemology and ethics. In this way, the book is part of a strong movement in contemporary philosophy that connects issues in epistemology and ethics by thinking about normative properties in both domains. The most notable recent works here include recent monographs on rationality (Kiesewetter 2017; Wedgwood 2017; forthcoming; Lord 2018; Worsnip 2021), recent monographs on responsibility and blame in epistemology (Boult forthcoming; Chrisman 2022), as well as books that develop broader meta-normative frameworks across the sub-disciplinary boundaries (e.g., McHugh and Way 2022; Lasonen-Aarnio forthcoming; Schroeder 2021; Weatherson 2019). These contributions help us to extend normative epistemology into broader normative theory. However, the position advanced in *Responsibility for Rationality* goes beyond such works by focusing *specifically* on the relationship between rationality and responsibility, which has been neglected in the recent literature.

There has been earlier work that connects issues surrounding responsibility and blame with issues surrounding reasons and rationality. However, the present book has an original approach that sets it apart from these previous titles, and it is informed by more recent discussions. First, David Owens' *Reason without Freedom* (Routledge 2000) is an early attempt to connect the two fields of research by arguing that problems in normative epistemology arise from a puzzle about epistemic responsibility. In contrast, the present book argues that the problem of mental responsibility arises specifically from the normativity of rationality. Second, Miriam Schleifer McCormick's *Believing Against the Evidence* (Routledge 2015) is concerned with responsibility and reasons for belief. Yet it doesn't connect the issues to the recent debate about the normativity of rationality, and it doesn't discuss the normativity of other attitudes than belief. Third, volumes that draw out connections between responsibility and reasons are Owens' *Normativity and Control* (OUP, 2017) and Joseph Raz's *From Normativity to Responsibility* (OUP, 2011). Although presenting a unified perspective, both titles are collections of earlier papers which concern several loosely connected themes. By contrast, the present work is a monograph with one coherent line of argument.

Thus, there is no monograph yet that brings out systematic connections between the more recent debates on responsibility and on rationality. Yet there is a broad interest in connecting strands of normative theory within epistemology and (meta)ethics. The book thus meets an important demand on the current philosophical market.

2.2 Main argument

Responsibility for Rationality presents a novel diagnosis of the problem of mental responsibility in part I (chapters 1–3). The problem originates from the intuition that attitudes can be normatively evaluated in ways that seem to presuppose direct responsibility. Evaluations of attitudes as 'irrational' play a key role in driving this intuition. For they seem to imply that the person

⁷ See Schmidt and Ernst (2020) for an attempt to bring some of these debates together. The debates include, but are not limited to, debates about responsibility for belief and, more generally, debates about responsibility and reasons for attitudes (see footnotes 1 and 2); debates about reasons and rationality especially of belief and intention (see footnotes 3 and 4); as well as debates about the normative dimensions of specific attitudes, like emotions (de Sousa 1987; Roberts 2003; Tappolet 2016), blame (Coates and Tognazzini 2013), and hope (McCormick 2017).

holding the irrational attitude is directly criticizable, and thus responsible, for the attitude.⁸ Note that rationality requires us to *be* in certain mental states. For instance, it might require us to believe in accordance with our evidence and intend in accordance with our reasons for action. If we fail to hold the attitudes that rationality requires, then we seem to be liable to criticism or blame. Importantly, these requirements are not reducible to requirements to perform actions by means of which we could manage our mental states – like inquiry, meditation, or controlling one’s attention. Indeed, it might be a sign of irrationality if one must first perform such actions to make oneself rational: the rational agent immediately revises an irrational attitude upon noticing it, and she does so in an effortless manner.⁹ So, if the *indirect* control that we can sometimes exercise over our mind cannot explain the *direct* responsibility that we have for complying with rational requirements, then what can?

Indirect voluntarists deny that we are ever responsible just for *being* rational. They must argue that rationality doesn’t place any normative requirements on us to *be* in a mental state: we are only required to *ensure* our rationality whenever there are decisive prudential or moral reasons to do so. To support their view, voluntarists can appeal to recently developed arguments to the effect that epistemic reasons and other right-kind reasons for attitudes aren’t ‘genuinely normative’ reasons.¹⁰ This would vindicate their view that we are never directly required to hold the attitudes that are best supported by right-kind reasons. Additionally, if these arguments were sound, then not even the views according to which rationality *consists* in responding correctly to right-kind reasons could vindicate the normativity of rationality.¹¹

Thus, recent doubts about the normativity of epistemic reasons and other right-kind reasons pose challenges for direct mental responsibility *and* for the normativity of rationality. In the following chapters, I spell out this challenge and offer a comprehensive reply. The aim is to vindicate the idea that we are *directly* and *genuinely* responsible for being (ir)rational: rationality places normative requirements on us to hold certain attitudes and we can be legitimately subject to serious blaming responses if we fail to comply with rational requirements.

The second part (chapters 4–5) concerns the rationality of belief, and specifically the normativity of epistemic reasons. I first spell out the challenge for the normativity of epistemic reasons from the recent literature. The challenge rests on two kinds of cases: trivial beliefs that raise the issue of clutter-avoidance (Harman 1996: 12) and conflicts between epistemic and practical reasons (Kauppinen 2023). After spelling out in detail how these cases can be employed to doubt whether epistemic reasons are normative, I reply to this challenge by arguing that epistemic irrationality is a vice that impairs one’s relationship to one’s epistemic community, thus warranting epistemic blame. Appropriate epistemic blame implies that a genuinely

⁸ See Kauppinen (2019: 3), Kieseewetter (2017: ch. 2), Parfit (2011: 123), Way (2009: 1). Worsnip (2021) pushes back on this idea, arguing that rational criticism is often ‘merely evaluative’.

⁹ I discuss the related issue of ‘rational delay’ (Podgorski 2017) in the book’s introduction to clarify this idea.

¹⁰ See the view of Maguire and Woods (2020) that epistemic reasons are not ‘authoritatively’ normative, and Maguire’s (2018) denial of reasons for affective attitudes. Similar doubts come from epistemic instrumentalism (Cowie 2014; 2019; Steglich-Petersen and Skipper 2019; 2020) and pragmatism (McCormick 2020; Rinard 2017; 2022). For critical discussions, see Kieseewetter (2021), Paakunainen (2018), and Schmidt (2024a; forthcoming).

¹¹ See Kieseewetter (2017) and Lord (2018), who argue that rationality consists in responding correctly to one’s possessed or available right-kind reasons yet take it for granted that right-kind reasons are normative. Worsnip (2021) has recently argued convincingly that requirements of structural rationality (or of coherence) provide us with right-kind reasons for structuring deliberation in certain ways. The challenge I discuss in the book is a challenge for any such view of rationality that vindicates rationality’s normativity in terms of right-kind reasons.

normative requirement has been violated – one that applies directly to belief, rather than merely to belief-managing actions. Epistemic blame thus reveals the normativity of epistemic rationality, and thereby the sense in which we can be said to be directly responsible for holding (ir)rational beliefs without assuming direct control over belief.¹²

The third part (chapters 6–8) generalizes this argument to other attitudes, especially desire, emotion, and intention. First, I show how the challenge for the normativity of epistemic reasons that I carved out in part II is also a challenge for the normativity of the rationality of desire, emotion, and intention. I then meet the generalized version of the challenge by arguing that distinctive blaming responses are appropriate towards all kinds of rational failure. I argue that violating rational requirements makes us vicious and impairs our relationships, which gives rise to legitimate blame, ranging from distinctively epistemic blame to genuine moral blame.¹³ Rationality sets standards of evaluation that we normatively expect each other to live up to, even if we cannot always (directly or indirectly) choose being rational.

Finally, by defending a *hybrid view* of responsibility for attitudes, I provide a way out of the dialectical stalemate between rationalist and indirect voluntarist views (see Schmidt 2024b: 48–49). Rationalists argue that we are directly responsible for our attitudes because attitudes are directly responsive to reasons. Voluntarists reply that reasons-responsiveness only gives rise to mere rational evaluability, which isn't genuine responsibility (see Peels 2017: 46–8, 159–60). Rationalists disagree; voluntarists remain unconvinced. I argue that we can get out of this stalemate by considering how we blame each other for irrationality. This provides rationalists with a convincing reply to voluntarists: the dichotomy between 'genuine blame' and 'mere rational evaluation' is false because irrational attitudes can warrant various kinds of genuine blaming responses. In addition, we can still acknowledge that the amount of indirect control we had over an irrational attitude affects the intensity and sometimes even the kind of blaming response that is appropriate, thus capturing the indirect voluntarist's intuitions.

Overall, the book develops *foundations of an ethics of mind* – a field that can be construed as arising from the ethics of belief (see Schmidt 2020a). On an abstract level, the ethics of mind aims at understanding the nature and structure of the norms that govern our attitudes. *Responsibility for Rationality* investigates the responsibility that is presupposed by these norms. It thereby also provides a basis for thinking about the ethics of mind in broader societal and political contexts, including questions about responsibility and blameworthiness in contexts of ideological indoctrination and epistemically polluted environments. The concluding chapter contains an agenda for further research in the ethics of mind.

2.3 Main claims

To summarize, the book defends the following main claims:

- (a) Responsibility for attitudes seems puzzling because intuitively we are directly responsible for complying with rational requirements. Therefore, understanding mental responsibility requires us to think about the normative status of rational requirements. (Chapters 1–2)
- (b) Substantive rationality implies a kind of structural rationality: insofar as we're *responsible* for being structurally irrational, we fail to respond correctly to our reasons. (Chapter 3)

¹² On epistemic blame, see Boulton (2020; 2021; forthcoming), Brown (2020), Kauppinen (2018), Piovarchy (2021). I argue in Schmidt (2024a) that epistemic blame reveals the normativity of evidential considerations.

¹³ I argue in Schmidt (2024b) that we can be morally blameworthy for failing to respond to reasons for attitudes.

- (c) The normativity of epistemic rationality faces a serious challenge from recent views that argue that epistemic reasons aren't 'genuinely normative' reasons. (Chapter 4)
- (d) The normativity of epistemic reasons, and thus the normativity of epistemic rationality, is revealed in our practice of epistemic blame. (Chapter 5)
- (e) The challenge for the normativity of epistemic rationality can be generalized to the rationality of other attitudes (desire, emotion, intention). Yet right-kind reasons for attitudes other than belief turn out to be normative in the same sense as epistemic reasons. (Chapter 6)
- (f) Our (ir)rationality matters for our interpersonal relationships and blaming practices: a person's (ir)rationality provides us with reasons to take up attitudes like (dis)trust and intentions (not) to engage in collective activity, such as rational discourse. (Chapters 5–6)
- (g) Responsibility for attitudes is not exhausted by indirect responsibility to manage our mind; rather, we are also *directly* responsible for being (ir)rational in virtue of our attitudes' reasons-responsiveness; yet indirect control matters for our blaming practices. (Chapters 5–6)
- (h) Violating rational requirements can even give rise to genuine *moral* blameworthiness. Thus, rationality and morality sometimes have a similar normative significance. (Chapter 7)

2.4 Structure

The structure of *Responsibility for Rationality* is intuitive: after introducing the project just sketched and defending an original diagnosis of the underlying philosophical problem (part I), the book has an epistemological part II and an (in the broadest sense) ethical part III. The epistemological part defends responsibility for *epistemic* rationality by tackling recent problems in normative epistemology. The ethical part reinforces the account presented in the epistemological part by generalizing it from responsibility for belief to responsibility for all attitudes, thus spelling out my hybrid account of mental responsibility, and by defending a continuity between epistemic blame and moral blame in chapter 7. I summarize each chapter in section 3 below.

2.5 Readership

Responsibility for Rationality addresses scholars who are interested in normative debates within epistemology, ethics, and moral psychology. By connecting debates on responsibility and rationality, it unifies different strings of philosophical discourse under the label of an 'ethics of mind'. This ensures a broad audience among advanced researchers.

However, the book also aims at being accessible to advanced students of philosophy. This is achieved by the book's introduction, which brings out the relevance of the present inquiry for philosophical theory as well as for our lives. Central concepts and debates that are relevant for the inquiry are introduced throughout the introductory chapters. In this way, the book will help students to engage more deeply with debates on responsibility and rationality that are becoming more specialized and technical, which makes them harder to access for students and young researchers who are not yet contributing themselves to these debates.

Each chapter is written in such a way that it can be understood without reading the whole book, so that the main parts of the book are appropriate reading for advanced and graduate seminars on problems in normative epistemology (part II) and theories of responsibility (part III). Central concepts and relevant philosophical debates are explained especially in part I, and detailed accounts of these concepts are cross-referenced within the book. This allows readers who wish to focus on only one part to refer to other parts when clarification is needed.

3. Abstracts of Chapters

Part I

The Problem of Mental Responsibility

This part builds up a systematic connection between the debates on responsibility and on rationality by reinterpreting the problem of mental responsibility. Chapter 1 frames the project and provides an overview of the relevant dialectical landscape. Chapter 2 argues that the normative status of right-kind reasons for attitudes, among which are epistemic reasons for belief, gives rise to the problem of mental responsibility. Chapter 3 connects right-kind reasons to the concept of rationality while situating the project within the recent discourse about the normativity of rationality; in particular, it illustrates the fruitfulness of the concept of responsibility for this debate.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides philosophical motivation for the present project. This motivation stems from a conflict between the apparent involuntariness of attitudes – due to their nature as mental *states* – and our practice of holding each other responsible for our attitudes. While the problem has received much attention during the last decades, both in epistemology and in ethics, its close connection to debates about reasons and rationality has been largely overlooked: the problem arises only *because* attitudes belong to a special category of states, namely those states that are responsive to reasons. The project of the present book is thus to understand responsibility for attitudes by thinking about reasons and rationality. It thereby connects two strands of debate within contemporary normative theorizing. Furthermore, the book delivers the foundations for an ethics of mind, which is concerned with the nature of the norms that govern our attitudes. The chapter closes with a summary of the other chapters of the book.

Chapter 2: Mental Responsibility

This chapter argues that traditional diagnoses of the problem of mental responsibility that locate its origin in a lack of direct or indirect voluntary control over attitudes don't reveal a genuine philosophical puzzle. Instead, the puzzle arises from the fact that attitudes are rationally evaluable: even if most of our attitudes are acquired automatically, they're nevertheless often acquired and held *for reasons* in these cases, and so they're evaluable in terms of whether they're based on *sufficient* reasons, i.e., whether they're (substantively) rational. If there are normative requirements that we be rational, then we are directly responsible for complying with these requirements; but it seems that neither voluntary nor non-voluntary forms of control could explain our direct responsibility for rationality. The task of this book is to make sense of this responsibility for rationality, in particular by appealing to our accountability practices. The chapter also clarifies the concepts of norms and reasons, and of responsibility and blame, as they are employed in the present investigation.

Chapter 3: Reasons and Rationality

The previous chapter located the central problem as a problem about responsibility for responding correctly to right-kind reasons. This chapter connects right-kind reasons to the concept of

rationality while also situating the project within the recent discourse about the normativity of rationality. In particular, I show how my overall argument in the book allows us to defend a close connection between rationality and reasons. The chapter argues that, if we focus on cases in which we are *responsible* for being (ir)rational, then being irrationally incoherent *implies* that one didn't respond correctly to one's right-kind reasons. This is an important link between *structural rationality* and *substantive rationality*: being substantively rational implies that one is structurally rational. The argument that is developed assumes that our capacity to respond to so-called 'right-kind' reasons grounds a kind of direct responsibility for attitudes. The remainder of the book can be read as defending this assumption. Overall, the book thereby illustrates how theories of rationality can benefit from thinking more about responsibility.¹⁴

Part II

The Normativity of Epistemic Rationality

This part defends a view according to which the normativity of epistemic reasons is revealed in our practice of blaming each other for our distinctively epistemic failures. Within epistemology, this constitutes an argument against certain pragmatist and instrumentalist accounts of epistemic reasons (or of right-kind reasons for belief). Responsibility for being *epistemically* rational is characterized, and the view is later generalized to other types of rationality in part III.¹⁵

Chapter 4: A Neglected Challenge for the Normativity of Epistemic Rationality

In contemporary epistemology, the normativity of epistemic rationality can seem puzzling. How can evidence provide us, all by itself, with normative reasons for or against belief? Chapter 4 is devoted to getting clear about this challenge, which comes in two shapes. *The first shape* arises from the problem of clutter avoidance: it seems that, if epistemic rationality is normative, we have reason to clutter our minds with uninteresting implications of our beliefs. Replying to this problem requires the normativist (about evidence and about epistemic rationality) to specify the conditions under which evidence provides us with genuine normative reasons for belief. However, this leads them into a dilemma: either the condition fails to explain the normativity of epistemic rationality, or it eliminates epistemic rationality by rendering it practical. *The second shape* of the challenge comes from cases in which our practical reasons require us to violate norms of epistemic rationality. Epistemologists have recently argued that such epistemic-practical conflicts show that there is no interesting sense in which we always ought to be epistemically rational, or that epistemic rationality is only part of an overall evaluation of what one ought to believe, all things considered. The chapter works out this challenge for the normativist from the recent literature on pragmatism and instrumentalism about reasons for belief and reconstructs the underlying argument. *Finally*, the chapter ends with a diagnosis: both arguments against normativism share a plausible assumption – namely, that there is a close connection between normative reasons and blameworthiness. The arguments are two shapes of the same

¹⁴ Note: This chapter further develops and contextualizes my argument of “Rationality and Responsibility” (*Australasian Philosophical Review* 4 (2020), 379–385).

¹⁵ Note: This part consists of elaborated and contextualized versions of my “Epistemic Blame and the Normativity of Evidence” (*Erkenntnis* 89 (2024), 1–24) and my “Doxastic Dilemmas and Epistemic Blame” (*Philosophical Issues*, forthcoming).

challenge for the normativity of epistemic rationality. This challenge consists in making the normativity of right-kind reasons intelligible: it is not obvious that we always *ought* to respond correctly to our right-kind reasons. This is the more generalized version of the challenge, that is, it is a challenge that is applicable to all right-kind reasons for attitudes, not just to epistemic reasons for belief. I return to this generalization of the challenge in more detail in chapter 6.

Chapter 5: Blameworthiness for Epistemic Irrationality

This chapter defends the normativity of epistemic rationality against the challenge from the last chapter by appealing to our epistemic blaming practices. I first offer a defense of the connection between reasons and blameworthiness that the challenge rests on: I argue that the challenge is right in assuming that epistemic reasons are normative only if there is such a thing as epistemic blame. Replying to the challenge thus requires me to defend the possibility of epistemic blame, especially in the context of the cases from chapter 4 that gave rise to the challenge: trivial belief (the cases that were central to the clutter avoidance problem) and epistemic-practical conflicts. The chapter then develops such a reply by building on the recent literature on epistemic blame and on insights from recent rationalist accounts of responsibility for attitudes. It is argued, first, that a subject can be epistemically blameworthy for being epistemically irrational even in cases where no practical stakes are involved. That is, there are plausible conditions on the normativity of evidence that do not render the requirements of epistemic rationality practical (such as the condition that one must *possess* sufficient evidence to *attend* to the question on which the evidence bears). Second, it is argued that a person can be epistemically blameworthy even when they were practically required to fail epistemically. This is revealed especially in cases where one had decisive reasons to cultivate an epistemic vice, which makes one blameless for cultivating the vice but doesn't fully justify or excuse one's irrational beliefs. Taken together, both arguments that reply to our challenge from chapter 4 reveal that epistemic rationality has normative significance independently of practical reasons to make oneself epistemically rational, and thus that we are directly responsible for complying with the requirements of epistemic rationality. Finally, by building on my previous arguments, the chapter presents a conception of epistemic rationality as an evaluative kind of normativity that matters for how we ought to relate to one another within our epistemic community. Overall, the chapter offers a reply to skepticism about the normativity of epistemic reasons, and it refutes indirect voluntarist accounts.

Part III

Foundations of an Ethics of Mind

In this final part, the book clarifies the direct responsibility that we have for our attitudes. In chapter 6, the argument from the second epistemological part is generalized: our evaluations of attitudes as (ir)rational imply that we can be directly responsible for our reasons-responsive attitudes, rather than merely for the actions and omissions that influence our attitudes. Second, a main worry with my argument – that responsibility for rationality is not ‘genuine’ responsibility – is addressed. It is argued that there is a continuity between rational criticism and moral blame: violating norms of rationality can sometimes cause moral harm, and if it does, then our practice of apology and forgiveness can sometimes become fully intelligible, thereby revealing moral blameworthiness for irrationality. This gives the idea of responsibility for rationality a more solid basis than the appeal to distinctively epistemic blame in chapter 5.

Chapter 6: A Hybrid Account of Mental Responsibility

This chapter develops my hybrid account of mental responsibility from the previous discussion. I first generalize the challenge from chapter 4 by applying it to right-kind reasons for desire, intention, and emotion: since there are plausible cases of trivial and counterproductive rational attitudes, the doubts about the normativity of epistemic rationality can be generalized to the rationality of other attitudes. I then defend the normativity of right-kind reasons for attitudes by defending the view that we are directly blameworthy for irrationality: irrationality can impair our relationships in various ways and warrant distinctive yet genuine blaming responses. Building on this generalized version of my main argument, the chapter then argues that there is a two-fold foundation of the ethics of mind. That is, it argues that we should allow for *two faces* of mental responsibility: direct responsibility for responding to right-kind reasons by directly forming or maintaining attitudes, and indirect responsibility for responding to wrong-kind reasons for attitudes by managing our attitudes. Both kinds of responsibility are essential to our blaming practices: any view that attempts to ground blameworthiness for attitudes either merely in reasons-responsiveness or merely in indirect control faces counterexamples. The chapter also defends a kind of internalism or perspectivism about blameworthiness by discussing the infamous case of the “rational racist” (Basu 2019), thus showing how the overall approach can illuminate responsibility in cases of indoctrination or epistemically misleading environments.

Chapter 7: Moralizing Rationality

This chapter breaks the stalemate between rationalist and voluntarist views of attitudinal responsibility. The chapter first bolsters the idea of blameworthiness for irrationality by showing how rational criticism or blame, including epistemic blame, need not be ‘cool’, but can plausibly be emotionally laden. It starts out with the observation that many of our attitudes are non-culpable: there was nothing that we should have done to avoid holding them. It argues that we can still be blameworthy for non-culpable attitudes: they can impair our relationships in ways that make our full practice of apology and forgiveness intelligible. It is argued that this practice of apology and forgiveness only makes sense under the presumption of genuine moral blameworthiness. This argument provides a distinctive new challenge for the view that indirect control grounds all responsibility for attitudes. To acknowledge the direct responsibility, we have for our attitudes, we must appeal to their responsiveness to right-kind reasons. That we morally blame each other for failures of reasons-responsiveness reveals a hitherto unnoticed normative force of rationality.¹⁶

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The concluding chapter summarizes the results and the contribution that the book makes to debates about responsibility and about rationality. Finally, it presents further research avenues and clarifies the implications of this inquiry for other issues in normative and applied epistemology and normative theory, thus setting an agenda for future research in the ethics of mind.

¹⁶ Note: This is a further developed and contextualized version of my “Blameworthiness for Non-Culpable Attitudes” (*Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 102 (2024), 48–64).

4. CV

I will send an up-to-date CV upon request. For the basic information, see [my departmental website](#) (which doesn't mention forthcoming publications), as well as [my page on the website of the Zurich Epistemology Group on Rationality \(ZEGRa\)](#).

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