

reply to shafer-landau, mcpherson, and dancy

It's a great privilege to receive such intense, careful, and fruitful scrutiny for my work, and my first response is to agree with most of what my critics have said and thank them both for understanding the views articulated in the book so well, and for advancing the discussion. But with privilege comes responsibility, and my responsibility in this reply is to have something more substantive to say. So my goal here will be to agree where agreement is appropriate, to retract and qualify where retraction and qualification are appropriate, to tentatively explore an idea or two which might fruitfully be wedded to those in the book, to clarify or correct in the rare places where it is necessary, to introduce a problem or two of my own for the views in the book, and finally to emphasize what I think is important. My strategy will be to organize my remarks topically, moving through topics more-or-less in the same order as in the book.

I clarifying the target of the analysis: objective and subjective reasons

As I noted in the Précis, Hypotheticalism offers a general explanatory theory about reasons – a *reductive* theory, and specifically a theory which reduces reasons, not just to other normative properties and relations, but in non-normative terms. But the word ‘reason’ can be used in confusingly different ways, and so I spend much of the first chapter clarifying the object of the analysis. Strictly speaking, Hypotheticalism is an account of what I call *objective* normative reasons, the considerations which are real truths about the world that actually, rather than merely potentially, count in favor of one action or another, independently of whether the agent is aware of them or recognizes that they are reasons. I contrast objective reasons with what I call *subjective* reasons. If the fact that there will be dancing at the party is a reason for Ronnie to go there but Ronnie doesn't realize that there will be dancing at the party, we sometimes say that this isn't a reason that Ronnie *has*. When we say things like this, what we are denying, is that it is one of Ronnie's subjective reasons. Although Hypotheticalism isn't *directly* an account of subjective reasons, I suggest in the book but don't argue that subjective reasons can themselves be understood in terms of objective reasons. Similarly, in the book I distinguish the notion of a *motivating* reason, or the reason *for which* someone acts.

Again, Hypotheticalism is not directly an account of motivating reasons, although I treat them as a special case of subjective reasons and hence as ultimately falling under the account.

Now Jonathan Dancy, in his remarks in this symposium, attributes to me two views about motivating reasons which he thinks are problematic. The first of these is the view that when Bernie takes a sip from his glass, his reason is *that he believed his glass to contain gin and tonic*, rather than the content of that belief. And the second is that, as a consequence, it is impossible for Bernie to act for good reasons, because the good reason for Bernie to take a sip isn't that he *believes* his glass to contain gin and tonic, but that it *does*. Fortunately, any appearance of a disagreement between me and Dancy over this point is based on a misunderstanding. Like Dancy, in the book and in other work I have consistently identified motivating reasons with the *contents* of beliefs which play a role in motivation, and for the same reasons as he does – in order to make sense of how agents can act for good reasons.

Dancy appears to have been led astray – he says that “the text is in contradiction” – by the fact that I allow that people sometimes talk about motivating reasons by saying things like “the reason why Bernie took a sip was that he believed that his glass contained gin and tonic”. And of course they do; Dancy and I don't disagree about this, either. Like me, Dancy thinks that such sentences aren't literally true. It doesn't follow that they aren't what people actually say.

2 what about value-based theories?

The most pressing issue raised in Dancy's remarks is the fact that whereas on the face of it, value-based theories of reasons are often thought of as the most pressing competitor to desire-based theories, there is remarkably little discussion of value-based theories in the book, other than a few isolated remarks that aren't developed. So this raises the question: what *about* value based-theories? What is my argument against them? Dancy goes on to try to reconstruct, from the text, what my beef with value-based theories must be, based on what I actually say in the text to motivate the Humean Theory in general and Hypotheticalism in particular.

But here I have to confess: the arguments I develop in the book weren't intended to be covert arguments against value-based theories; rather, I think that value-based theories get ruled out for reasons that I didn't have the opportunity to adequately develop and discuss in the book, but which I've written about elsewhere.¹ (This fits with the book's overall aim to show that the Humean Theory is *defensible* by

¹ See particularly Schroeder [2007b], but also Schroeder [2006] and [2010].

showing how to construct a version of the Humean Theory that can respond to *objections*.) However, one issue that *is* clear from the book, I think, is that we get a reductive view from a value-based theory of reasons only if value can in turn be reduced in non-normative terms. But for a variety of reasons, including specifically the issues raised by my response to the Too Many Reasons problem, I think that reducing reasons in non-normative terms is much more promising than reducing value in non-normative terms. I also find the hypothesis that normative claims are all essentially claims about reasons to have more independent plausibility than the thesis that they are all ultimately claims about value, and this hypothesis requires value to be understood in terms of reasons, rather than conversely.

But more to the point, in my view the main problem with value-based theories of reasons is that they are all going to need, somehow, to appeal to some kind of ‘agent-relative’ value, in order to be able to explain the way in which reasons and their weights work in ‘agent-relative’ cases, including saliently cases of moral constraints and of special obligations. But unfortunately for value-based theories, my view, which I have argued for in other places, is that there *is no* such thing as agent-relative value.² The best way I know of, of making sense of ‘agent-relative value’ or something that can play its role is what there is reason for agents to *desire* or *prefer*.³ But I think it’s a mistake to account for reasons to act in terms of reasons to desire or prefer, because that precludes giving a *general* account of reasons which applies equally well to both reasons for action and reasons to desire or prefer. So I think that if we aspire to a general account of reasons, it can’t look like that.

3 why do we need a general theory of reasons?

Unfortunately, however, Dancy also worries that there is really no need for a general theory of reasons, or at least for an informative one. There is little that I can say to convince him, and as he notes, the book doesn’t endeavor to convince someone with his perspective that there is a need for such a general explanatory theory. But that’s not to say that the book provides no argument that we do need such a general explanatory theory. It’s just that the book’s primary argument for the need for such a general theory has a conclusion that is much stronger – for it is an argument in favor of having a *reductive* account of reasons and other normative properties and relations, which reduces them in *non-normative* terms.

The argument is simple, and suggestive, rather than conclusive. It starts from the observation that the normative supervenes on the non-normative, and the principle that there are no brute metaphysical

² See Schroeder [2006], [2007].

³ Compare Garcia [1986] and Portmore [forthcoming].

impossibilities.⁴ Since supervenience is simply a pattern of metaphysical impossibilities, and the principle tells us that those can't be brute, it follows that supervenience requires explanation. Reductive theories are particularly well-suited to provide exactly this kind of explanation. This motivation has a much stronger conclusion than Dancy asked for, and it's not one that he's going to find personally convincing. But it's what I personally find most compelling about the motivations for reductivism in metaethics, and it's the main motivation for such reductivism offered in the book. Since reductivism requires a general theory, it's therefore an argument for a general theory.

4 what's the big deal about the standard model theory?

In the book I spend a fair bit of time discussing what I call the *standard model* for explanations of reasons, and what I call the *Standard Model Theory*, which is just the theory that all explanations of reasons follow the standard model. Since Dancy is looking for how to interpret my arguments in favor of the Humean Theory and specifically in favor of Hypotheticalism as arguments against value-based theories, in his remarks he supposes that something about my extensive remarks about the standard model must be doing part of the work. But as I noted above, there aren't any direct arguments against value-based theories in the book; I think they can only be ruled out when a larger set of considerations is taken into account. So what work is the discussion of the standard model doing?

As Dancy notes, a different name for reasons whose explanation follows the standard model might be 'derivative reason' or 'instrumental reason'. So the Standard Model Theory is just the theory that all reasons are either derivative (instrumental) or inexplicable. This is exactly analogous to the idea that the only things whose goodness can be explained are things that are only derivatively (instrumentally) good. And that is certainly a familiar idea – it was the idea that plausibly led Moore to think that intrinsic goodness has to be an intrinsic property (because otherwise it could depend on, and hence be explained by, the presence or absence of other factors), and on my reading, it's what was at work in Mill's claim that no proof is possible of the goodness of something that is intrinsically good. I make a lot of weather out of this theory in the book, because I believe that it and its ilk are one of the most powerful false ideas in all of moral philosophy – much more powerful and much more importantly false than the value-based theory of

⁴ In the most resourceful challenge to this kind argument that I know of, Ralph Wedgwood [2007] utilizes his rejection of S5 for metaphysical modality to argue (as I would put it) that some metaphysical impossibilities can be contingent but not brute, because they are themselves explained by contingent facts. See Schroeder [2008] and especially Schmitt and Schroeder [forthcoming] for discussion.

reasons. Since I was more worried about the falsity of this idea than I was about the falsity of the value-based theory, I allocated space and discussion accordingly.

Dancy appears to find it hard to credit why it is worth spending so much time over the Standard Model Theory, but I think a single observation suffices both to explain why this reaction is to be expected from Dancy, in particular, and its irony. That observation is that a better name for the Standard Model Theory might be *Transcendental Generalism* – the very stalking horse of Dancy’s own work on moral particularism, especially in *Ethics Without Principles*.⁵ This observation, which again I develop elsewhere⁶, suffices to explain why Dancy finds it obvious that the Standard Model Theory is so obviously false, and why it is somewhat ironic that he’s puzzled why I spend so much time over it, because he himself has spent so much time and effort over it. But it also explains why Dancy has been put in a somewhat awkward position in being asked to respond to my book, given that he doesn’t accept either my view or anything like the kind of view that was my primary stalking horse.

Finally, it’s worth observing that not only do I not use the standard model to refute value-based theories of reasons, but contrary to one of Dancy’s suggestions, value-based explanations of reasons cannot, in and of themselves, constitute an alternative to either standard model (that is, subsumptive) explanations or to reductive explanations. That’s because value-based theories of reasons cross-cut the subsumptive/reductive division, and face all of the same problems and issues raised in chapter 3 for desire-based theories. According to some value-based theories, the reasons that are explained by values are themselves derivative from a more general reason to promote or honor values. These theories follow the standard model, and face the same choice between Incoherence and Chauvinism discussed in chapter 3 for desire-based theories. According to other value-based theories, in contrast, values explain reasons because all it takes for something to be a reason is for it to be part of what explains why an action will promote some value. These theories aren’t reductive in the sense of reducing reasons to the *non*-normative, but they follow the reductive model nonetheless, by reducing reasons to values (though the reduction may stop there). There *may* be a third way of understanding how values explain reasons, but if so, there will also be an analogous third way of understanding how desires explain reasons. So even proponents of value-based theories should care, I believe, about the same set of issues raised and explored in chapter 3.

⁵ ‘Anti-Transcendental Particularism’ is coined by McKeever and Ridge [2006], so the kind of generalism to which it is opposed would naturally be called ‘Transcendental Generalism’.

⁶ See Schroeder [2009].

5 Too Many Reasons

Chapter 5 of the book is devoted to explaining the force of, and responding to, the worry that the Humean Theory generates too many reasons. My response amounts to a kind of bullet-biting; I agree that these predictions are intuitively wrong, but I argue that so long as our view makes the right predictions about the *weights* of the reasons involved, these intuitions are not to be trusted, in any case. The prediction that there is a reason to do things that intuitively there is no reason to do is not such a problematic prediction, I claim, if it comes along with the prediction that it is a reason of extremely negligible weight, and that it is the kind of thing that *would* be a reason to do the thing in question, if anything were.

Neither Shafer-Landau nor McPherson takes issue with the exact moves of this response, but both worry that I've gone too far in biting bullets. In particular, both worry that by allowing *uninformed* desires to generate reasons, the official doctrine of Hypotheticalism goes problematically over the edge. In response I can only offer a confession. The move of allowing that even uninformed desires can generate reasons was motivated as much by dialectical and illustrative considerations, as it was by argument or direct plausibility. It would be easy to modify Hypotheticalism to restrict its application to informed desires, and in writing the book I took this to be obvious. You just have to be careful not to restrict it in ways that involve an essentially normative clause. But I wanted to show how powerful a response to the Too Many Reasons problem my response was, by showing that it could be used in defense even of an unrestricted view. I still think it can be.

6 Too Few Reasons

Up to this point, I think the book as written stands up fairly well to the criticisms that it has received, both here and elsewhere, which is fortunate, since I think that the diagnosis and dismissal of the Standard Model Theory in chapter 3, the motivations for, conception of, and defense of reduction in chapter 4, and the discussion of negative existential intuitions about reasons in chapter 5 are some of the most important contributions of the book. But starting at this point, the competing pressures on Hypotheticalism really start to show through, as brought out in tandem by the remarks of both Shafer-Landau and McPherson, particularly with respect to Hypotheticalism's response to the Too Few Reasons objection, and its account of the weight of reasons. And this is particularly unfortunate, because in my view the account of reasons' weight is also among the most significant contributions of the book, and the response to the Too Few Reasons problem is, though not among the book's more significant contributions, nevertheless plausibly its sexiest and most easily articulated selling point.

From an intuitive point of view, the most surprising aspiration of Hypotheticalism is to give an adequate account of the reasons involved in claims of moral wrongness, which seem to be reasons for anyone, no matter what they desire. So it's no wonder that this is where the threads start to show through, or that it is the most difficult thing for the view to get to work. Both McPherson and Shafer-Landau draw out many of the most important reasons why this problem remains difficult for Hypotheticalism.

Again I have to start with a confession. I now think that I overstated the difference between my approach in the book, and what in the book I called the Velleman Hypothesis – the idea that there is a single desire that must be shared by anyone, in order for them to count as an agent, at all. Against Velleman, I lodged two objections in the book: first, that though his account can explain why there are some reasons which are necessarily shared by every agent (which I called the *weak modal status*), it still yields the prediction that these reasons depend on desires, in the sense that there is some desire such that if you didn't have that desire, you wouldn't have that reason (the negation of what I called the *strong modal status*). My second criticism of Velleman was that in order to make good on the idea that there is some desire that you have to have, in order to count as an agent, Velleman needs some very strong assumptions about what is involved in agency.

However, as Shafer-Landau notes in his remarks, there are two different ways in which my own answer to how there could be reasons shared by necessarily any agent might be developed. On the strict reading of what I say in the text, an ambitious thesis which Shafer-Landau calls (O), moral reasons can be explained by pretty much any desire whatsoever. But this idea is very ambitious, and in fact needn't work out, in order for the view to work out. On a less ambitious idea, Shafer-Landau's (P), there need only be *some* desire that any agent has, which can be used to explain the reason. I now agree with Shafer-Landau that the less ambitious idea is the right way to develop the theory. But this means that though Hypotheticalism can still contrast with the Velleman Hypothesis in at least aspiring to predict the strong modal status, it's in something like broadly the same boat as the Velleman Hypothesis, in needing to make ambitious claims about what is necessary for agency, or at least for moral agency.

Fortunately (or perhaps unfortunately), I think this issue is closely related to a different problem that none of the commentators broached, but which has concerned me for quite some time. And that is the question as to whether it is really true that moral reasons are shared by anyone who has any reasons at all. Both children and some kinds of cognitively sophisticated animals look like counterexamples to this thesis. Both seem to be able to have and act for certain kinds of reasons, but because they are not in a position to be able to recognize or appreciate the force of moral reasons, there are grounds to doubt that moral reasons

apply to them, at least with the same force that they apply to us. So this makes me suspect that the datum that moral reasons are reasons for anyone, no matter what they desire, is mis-described if interpreted as entailing that they are reasons for anyone with reasons at all (as, of course, I interpreted it in the book). If this is right, then the right aspiration for an account of moral reasons, at least, is not to explain reasons that are shared by anyone with reasons at all (as the book explicitly aims to do), but to explain reasons that are shared by any *moral* agent – a category that may turn out to be more inclusive than adult humans (on a still broadly Kantian spin), equivalent to the class of adult humans (on a broadly Aristotelian spin), or less inclusive (on some alternative Aristotelian spins, as well as on certain contextualist ways of taking the idea).

If this idea is right, then there's a way of seeing the problem about animals and children as actually giving Hypotheticalism some extra leverage, once it retreats its ambitions appropriately, for explaining how Shafer-Landau's (P) could be true, with at least somewhat fewer commitments than Velleman gets into, in order to defend the Velleman Hypothesis. This is because once we divorce the concept of being a moral agent – and hence being someone who needs to share moral reasons – from that of being an agent *simpliciter*, so that you're capable of having and responding to reasons at all, the idea of moral agency will give us more substance to work with, in spelling out why it is that any moral agent is going to have some desire whose object will be promoted by not acting wrongly. I'm now inclined to think that this is going to be a more reasonable view than that I adopted in the book, and that the prospects for it to work are going to be more promising, as well.

7 explaining moral reasons

Of course, as Shafer-Landau and McPherson both note, I say very little in the book about how such explanations might work, and so their prospects are very difficult to evaluate. They also both note the fact that some of the structural features of Hypotheticalism are content-neutral, whereas moral reasons are content-specific, is cause to be doubtful about anything like this working out, whereas the reasons for optimism adduced in the book look like wishful thinking, in contrast. And I have to confess to having been too caught up, in writing the book, in what I suppose might be described as youthful optimism, in the ways that I thought I'd shown Hypotheticalism to do *better* than other views saddled with the same explanatory project, and insufficiently worried, at the time of writing the book, about whether doing *better* amounts to doing *well enough*. So these criticisms are well-taken. So in this section I'd like to explore, without quite committing to it, one idea about what might be special about at least one kind of explanation

of why moral reasons are shared – an explanation that fits, I think, with a possible answer to the difference between being a moral agent and merely being able to act for reasons discussed in the last section.

The idea I want to explore, is that specifically *moral* requirements aren't just things that the agents under the requirements have reasons to do, but are also things that other agents have reasons to *expect* them to do, or censure them for not doing. If this sort of idea is right, then an explanation of why all moral agents share reasons to act in accordance with moral requirements can start with an explanation of why all moral agents share a reason to expect that sort of behavior of one another. Then, at the second stage, it might explain why moral agents all have a reason to act in accordance with moral requirements, by explaining a reason to live up to the legitimate expectations of others. To have such a reason, you need only to have a desire that would be fulfilled by living up to others' legitimate expectations. This picture therefore fits together with a picture of moral agents as agents who have an interest in living up to one another's expectations. Such a desire could be a desire for esteem, love, or approval, or even just a desire not to be despised. It would have to be some sort of essentially social desire, but that fits with the idea that moral agency is essentially a kind of social agency.

This is just a partial sketch of just one way of pursuing the idea that moral agency is actually more restrictive than the capacity to have and respond to reasons in general, and of how to use that restriction in order to fill in how the explanation of why moral reasons are shared by all moral agents can be successful. As I mentioned in the book, one of the things I don't like about stories like this – even when I find them appealing in other ways – is that I'm always skeptical that anything like this can be the *whole* story about the central reasons to act in accordance with moral requirements. What I really suspect (or at least, as Shafer-Landau and McPherson point out, hope for), is that something like this is just one of a set of interrelated and overlapping stories about what is worthwhile about moral action. Each of these stories might advert to features that can be lacked by some creatures who have desires and are therefore able to have and act for reasons, but which are shared by a more restrictive class of moral agents – a class which, on the broadly Kantian aspirations of the theory, might still be much more inclusive than human agents, or which, on various options for retreat, might end up being less ambitious, but enough for the kinds of agents who we are, nonetheless.

8 weighting for reasons

McPherson and Shafer-Landau also warn us of the fundamental tension at the heart of Hypotheticalism – the tightrope that needs to be walked, in order for the view to work. This is that the key to the Too Few

Reasons problem is to relax the promotion relation – the relationship that an action must bear to the object of a desire in order for there to be a reason to perform that action that is explained by that desire. But if we relax the promotion relation too far, then we get reasons that there are not, running afoul of the Too Many Reasons objection, and in the worst case envisioned by McPherson, relaxing it too much will actually get us explosion. If it weren't for the special commitments of my account of the weight of reasons, Hypotheticalism might weather this storm by erring on the side of Too Many Reasons, and wielding the bullet-biting strategy of chapter 5 all the more broadly. But as Shafer-Landau's discussion of my treatment of the weight of reasons makes clear, the explosion worry creates a special problem for me.

To see why, as well as to assess just how sharp this problem is, we need to be careful to get all of the pieces of my account of the weight of reasons on the table. Unfortunately, Shafer-Landau's statement of my account has one key inaccuracy. According to Shafer-Landau, my view is that the weight of a reason is the weight that everyone who is deliberating would place on it – and that is the assumption to which he objects. But that is not the view in the book. The view in the book is that the weight of a reason is the weight that every deliberator would have *reasons of the right kind* to place on it. What everyone would do and what everyone would have reason to do are two very different things.

Setting aside a number of issues of setup that are important for getting anything precise, my view of the weight of reasons actually has five separate parts. First, there is the view that the weight of a reason is the weight that it is *correct* to place on it. Second, I endorse the view that what it is correct to do is determined by the balance of a certain kind of reason – reasons of the 'right kind'. (Putting these first two ideas together leads me to treat the weight of reasons *recursively*.) Third, I argue for a general strategy of understanding the 'right kind'/'wrong kind' distinction by taking 'right kind' reasons to be those which are generated by an *activity*, very broadly construed. Fourth, there is the specific way I offer of implementing this more general strategy: I take activities to generate reasons whenever there are reasons that would necessarily be shared by anyone engaged in that activity. And fifth and finally, I assume for convenience in the book that the activity to which the 'right kind' of reasons are relative, for the sake of evaluating reasons' *weight*, is the activity of *deliberation*, which for convenience I further assume is the activity that is shared by all and only agents. The first three parts of the view are essential; the fourth part is important for the argumentative strategy that I adopt in the book but could conceivably be replaced with something else.⁷ In contrast, the fifth part of this view is motivated largely by what was dialectically convenient for the

⁷ I defend a modified version of this view in Schroeder [2010], but arguably further modifications are still needed.

purposes of what was already an unfortunately over-complicated part of the book, because it allowed me to shift part of the burden of chapter 7 back onto chapter 6.

The fundamental tension in Hypotheticalism is that if the explosion of agent-neutral reasons about which McPherson worries is a reality, then there are agent-neutral reasons to do everything, and hence the base step of the recursion generating reasons' weight will never get triggered. So it would follow that no reasons are weightier than any others – which makes the initial unintuitiveness of the explosion of reasons catastrophic.

Yes – this *is* the fundamental tension in the project. To carry off the project, we need to be able to articulate a conception of the *promotion* relation that is weak enough to make it possible to explain the moral reasons that we want, without being so weak as to allow in too many reasons of the 'right kind' to play a role in the account of reasons' weight. I honestly don't know if this tightrope walk can be carried off, but as in the book, I'm going to have to justify the constructive effort to make it work, in terms of its potential fruits.

But I think there is more room than McPherson allows to make good on the view. To begin with, clearly more care needs to be taken over the exact formulation of the promotion relation than I took in the book (where I didn't worry so much about the details, so much as about articulating the objective that it be understood as very weak). I don't accept the characterization of its laxness offered by McPherson and used by him in his arguments that I am committed to explosion (though it is clearly suggested by things I said in the book), and I'm far from sure that the version stated by Shafer-Landau (which is the official view from the book) is the right way for Hypotheticalism to come down on this question. What I think, is that as much as I wanted to avoid this when writing the book, to resolve this question I am going to have to get my hands dirtier with trying to explain moral and other content-specific 'agent-neutral' reasons.

9 options for retreat

I also think that there is more room to retreat from the sexiest claims of the book than McPherson suggests, and still preserve the spirit of the view. For example, McPherson expresses skepticism about whether either the Aristotelian retreat or the 'crude relativist' retreat offered in chapter 6 are comfortable or stable stopping-places, and suggests that they would undermine the account of weight (as discussed in the previous section). But this last suggestion conflates the convenient final assumption that I made about the nature of the activity of deliberation with the essential features of the account of weight. If one of these

retreats is taken, then this convenient assumption would need to be replaced with something more realistic about who needs to count as a deliberator.

And actually I think McPherson is wrong as well to think that the ‘crude relativist’ retreat would put us on a slippery slope to crude solipsistic speaker subjectivism. After all, as McPherson notes in a footnote, in the book I independently motivate the view that expressions like ‘there is a reason to do A’ need to be understood as quantifying over a contextually determined class of agents including the speaker. But if this is right, then my ‘crude relativist’ view can explain, while McPherson’s solipsistic speaker subjectivism cannot, why ‘if something is wrong, then there is a reason not to do it’ expresses a truth in any context. This difference seems to me like ample reason not to slip down the slope.

10 normative epistemology

McPherson rightly notes that my normative epistemology treats self-ascriptions of reasons and other-ascriptions differently. I plead guilty. Moreover, I don’t know if this is right; it’s a prediction that has bothered me for some time. I’m not satisfied by McPherson’s assertions about the phenomenology, but I could be persuaded by empirical research about developmental psychology, if such research genuinely reveals no asymmetries, here. For if Hypotheticalism gets the basic source of our normative knowledge right, our judgments about others’ reasons are going to have to either be informed by some kind of imaginative simulation exercise, or else are going to have to fall out of general judgments.

Another possibility, however, is suggested by the idea explored in section 7. According to that idea, when something is wrong, there aren’t just reasons not to do it; there are also reasons to expect others not to do it. It could be that in the cases of wrong actions, we directly judge the existence of the reason to expect you not to do something, and infer the existence of your reason not to do it from that. This might go some way toward filling in some of the holes in what is a genuine, and at least potentially problematic, commitment of the view.

11 general problems require general solutions

The main goal of *Slaves of the Passions* was to explore the set of issues which arise when we note that though some reasons are shared, others are idiosyncratic. As I saw it then and still see it now, there are basically two points of view about this. On the first, shared reasons require no explanation – the reason why there is a reason for *you* not to do what is wrong, on this view, is just that there is a reason not to do what is wrong. So far from consisting merely of non-explanatory foot-stomping, this view explains the reasons agents have

in terms of the reasons there are.⁸ On this view, what require explanation, are the reasons that are idiosyncratic. This is the view about wrongness held by Ralph Cudworth, Samuel Clarke, and Richard Price, and it is codified by what I call the Standard Model Theory. An important part of my goal in the book was to show that this perspective is powerful and interesting, but false.

The alternative to this picture is to hold that when reasons are shared, that is because there happens to be an overlap in reasons. On this view, the idiosyncrasy of some reasons requires no special explanation, for it requires only the failure of all agents' reasons to overlap. What requires explanation, on this view, is when there is widespread overlap that appears not to be coincidental – when *everyone* seems to share some reasons, in spite of apparently huge differences between them. The Humean Theory is famous and hotly contested precisely because it makes the overlap in agents' reasons hard to explain – so it's a perfect testing-ground for exploring ideas about how to make that explanation work. But it's not alone in *needing* to explain this overlap in agents' reasons, somehow. *Every* view on which shared reasons are just individuals' reasons that happen to overlap needs to have an explanation for this overlap, when it occurs.

⁸ See Schroeder [2007c], and contrast Korsgaard [1996].

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