

Review of Alan H. Goldman *Reasons from Within* (OUP 2009)

In *Reasons from Within* Alan Goldman defends a broadly Humean or internalist theory of normative reasons, according to which a fact's status as a reason is in some sense dependent on the existing motivational states of the agent whose reason it is. According to Goldman facts constitute reasons for action "because they indicate how those actions will tend to satisfy our desires" (30). More precisely, Goldman defends the following definition of agents' reasons:

S has an F reason R to do act A = S is F-minded, and because of that, if rational, would be motivated by awareness of R to do A (34).

Here F stands for a broad area of motivational concern (38), such as morality, aesthetics or, indeed, philosophy. On this analysis the fact that Goldman's book is philosophically enlightening is a reason for you to read it just in case you are interested in philosophical enlightenment and, because of that, if rational, would be motivated by awareness of this fact to read it. Those without an interest in philosophy have no such reason (38-41). Thus reasons are bounded by our interests.

Goldman's defence of internalism aims to be comprehensive. He argues (in chapters 1 and 5) that internalism is metaphysically, epistemologically and motivationally superior to its externalist rival, which seems to require the postulation of a mysterious reason relation, objective value, and a mysterious faculty of intuition whose recognitions of objective value can somehow motivate. He argues (chapter 2) that the internalist position can avoid the undesirable implication that all desires, no matter how unsavoury, generate reasons, by restricting the class of desires that generate reasons to those that are rational. Here rationality is understood in terms of relevant (though not full) information and coherence: "An irrational agent acts or fails to act in such a way as to defeat the satisfaction of her most important or central concerns" (78). He argues (chapter 4) that internalism can explain, or explain away, reasons seemingly not based in the desires of agents, such as reasons for desires themselves and reasons to be moral. In the former case Goldman concedes that our deepest concerns can provide reasons for more specific desires, but insists these deepest concerns (for example for the welfare of one's children) themselves need no reason (129-31). In the latter case Goldman draws on a nuanced distinction between the reasons an agent *has* and reasons *there are* (36-7), claiming that although there may be moral reasons to prevent suffering, for example, these are reasons that only the morally-minded *have* (153-5). Hence, on Goldman's view, there can be reasons that no one has. With characteristic insight, Goldman notes that accusing the non-morally-minded of a failure to comprehend reasons merely reflects "a desire to condemn such characters as thoroughly as possible" (167). Finally, recognising that an account of reasons that bases them in desire owes an account of desire, Goldman defends a 'cluster' analysis of the latter according to which a prototypical component of a desire for an object is a positive evaluation of it. According to Goldman, desires containing such an evaluation are more likely to be part of a coherent set of desires, thus more likely to generate reasons: "this [evaluational] component of a desire reflects its relations to other desires of the agent, and that is why it is a crucial aspect of those desires that create reasons" (114).

One of the most interesting parts of the book is reductive the analysis of rationality (chapter 2). According to Goldman, rationality in both the theoretical (belief-involving) and practical (action-involving) sense involves coherence, and coherence

involves the avoidance of self-defeat (55). Since the natural constitutive aim of belief is truth, to have inconsistent beliefs is to defeat this aim, and is therefore irrational (66-8). Likewise, since the natural constitutive aim of actions is to satisfy the desires that prompt them, to fail to intend the known means to one's ends, for example, is to frustrate this aim and thus condemn oneself to self-defeat (69-76). The question of why we should avoid self-defeat (that is, the question of the source of the norms of rationality) is dismissed as a non-question: it is constitutive of believers and agents to aim at truth and the satisfaction of their deepest desires respectively, so there is no question of why they should do so: "The constitutive aims of beliefs and actions take the place of...irreducibly mysterious facts as the ultimate source of reasons or normativity" (181, see also 59, 73-5, 257). This account of rationality generates what I found one of the most novel and interesting arguments for internalism in the book (71-2). Just as the constitutive aim of belief specifies the criteria of success for belief and thus determines what counts as reasons for belief, the constitutive aim of action specifies the criteria of success for action and thus determines what counts as reasons for action. Facts will therefore be reasons when they "indicate ways or means of succeeding in our beliefs or actions" (72) and success for actions is satisfying the desires that prompt them. This argument – similar one considered by Millar in Robertson (ed.) *Spheres of Reason* (OUP 2009) – has the added benefit of giving a unified account of practical and theoretical reasons.

This is a book about reasons, and much else besides. Recognising the potential connections between reasons, value, desire, rationality, well-being, pleasure and agency, Goldman defends controversial views of all these topics. The result is a book that is wide-ranging, although sometimes brisk in its treatment of existing debates. There is, for example, no discussion of the differences within the broadly internalist or Humean camp. Discussion of Schroeder's *Slaves of the Passions* (OUP 2007), which develops a Humean but non-internalist position, is left to a footnote. Although there is extensive discussion of the problems with postulating objective non-natural value properties, the parts of the book connecting this value objectivism to externalism about reasons move very quickly. For example, Goldman is a little unclear as to whether, on the externalist account, objective values *reduce* to external reasons (11, 21), or whether the former *provide* the latter (10, 12, 17). Views such as Skorupski's (cf. 'Propositions about Reasons' in *European Journal of Philosophy* 2006), which seek to divorce external reasons from objectivist metaphysics, are not countenanced. It is noteworthy, returning to the source of recent debates about reasons, that Williams speaks primarily not of reasons themselves but of statements about reasons. Goldman is not alone in taking the important debate to concern the question of what it is in the world that makes something a reason, tacitly assuming that reason-statements require substantive truth-makers. There is also an uneasy focus in the latter parts of the book, where some of the topics that do receive extensive discussion (for example the nature and value of pleasure, 222-234) are only tangentially related to the main conclusions. In justifying the discussion of pleasure Goldman claims that "Pleasure...figures centrally in the objectivist account, almost as centrally as does desire in the internalist account" (124), but no references are given.

Goldman's style is discursive (rather than regimented) and witty. The chapters, though long (60 or more pages) are invariably rewarding. The above criticisms are minor, and really only serve to highlight avenues for future elaboration. As a manifesto for the internalist position that clearly sets out its form, scope and challenges Goldman's book is

unsurpassed. All those with an interest in understanding normativity, in ethics or epistemology, have overwhelming reason to read it.

- Neil Sinclair