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PRACTICAL REASONS AND MISTAKES OF PRACTICAL RATIONALITY

This paper will consider a broad objection against subjective accounts of reasons for action. I will conclude, tentatively, that there is no telling objection in the neighborhood where many have thought there was. The objection is this. Subjectivists have generally been clear that the concerns that allegedly determine one's practical reasons are counterfactual concerns. Typically, for example, it is held that such concerns must be informed. But subjectivists have had little to say about what else must go right besides having good information if the resulting concerns are to have normative authority. Yet it seems possible to make bad uses of good information. If such practical processing of good information can be done well or badly, then subjectivists would have to tell a story about what counts as good practical processing of good information. The worry is that subjectivists cannot tell an adequate story about the differences between good and bad practical processing. And if this were so, then subjectivists would be unable to provide a convincing story about our reasons for action. As I am understanding this worry, it purports to be a preemptive criticism of all versions of subjectivism such that, if it were successful, one could be assured that no subjectivist account could be acceptable.

   As I say, I will attempt to defend subjectivism from this worry. But to be honest, I am still struggling with how best to understand this underdiscussed and important general criticism of subjectivism. Further, a full response to such a worry would probably require a fully worked out version of subjectivism and I do not have such a theory to offer and I do not think anyone else does either. Here I aim to make a start at defusing the preemptive worry.

1. Subjectivism and Concerns

Subjective accounts of reasons for action claim that what makes it the case that consideration C provides P a reason to O is the existence of certain contingent features of agency, namely concerns, of P. It is the contours of a person's contingent concerns that makes it the case that she does or does not have a reason to do something.[1] The subjectivist claims that ideal deliberation, absent input from an agent's contingent concerns, does not yield determinate conclusions about what the agent has reason to do. Thus, for example, the fact that I happen to like Dairy Queen swirl cones dipped in chocolate might give me a reason to stop there on my way home from work on such an account. But if I did not happen to like that, I would not have such a reason.

The notion of concerns at work here is important to the subjectivist account but difficult to satisfactorily analyze. I will not have enough to say about such states here. The most popular neo-Humean understanding of desires is based on the notion of direction of fit. Intuitively the idea is that beliefs aim to track the world (and so tend to go out of existence when one is confronted with an appearance to the effect that the world is not as one believes) whereas desires aim not to track the world but to impose themselves upon the world (such that they do not similarly tend to go out of existence in the face of such appearances). I think the direction of fit understanding of desires is unsuccessful, yet I lack a better account.[2] Essential to the subjectivist's understanding of concerns (wants, preferences, desires, etc.) is that such states are not truth-assessable and not best thought of as accurate or inaccurate responses to the value of options.[3] To take a simple example, I can prefer chocolate

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[1] This contrasts with the general understanding of what Stephen Darwall has called, variously, "existence internalism" or "metaphysical internalism" which is presented, by Darwall, Williams, Korsgaard and others, as a thesis about necessary or necessary and sufficient conditions for being a reason. So understood, the thesis of internalism does not commit one to a view about what makes it the case that C provides P with a reason to O. Thus the internalism debate addresses a different question than the subjectivism debate and one could be an internalist objectivist. Indeed, I think that Michael Smith's view of reasons in (1994) counts as an instance of internalist objectivism. For an argument that we ought to reject internalism but can nonetheless embrace subjectivism, see my (2001a). For related arguments see Johnson (1999).

[2] Michael Smith, in his (1994), offers a good presentation of this view. For criticism of such views see Sobel and Copp (2001, pp. 44-53).

[3] On an increasingly popular conception of desire, to have a desire for P constitutively involves taking oneself to have a reason for P. Subjectivists must reject such a view. For a prominent recent advocate of the subjectivism unfriendly understanding of desire see

ice cream to vanilla or have the reverse preference, without making any mistake about either flavor or their respective value.

In the case of belief it is typically thought that the truth provides standards that belief should aim for (some say that only if a state aims at truth is it a belief). The subjectivist denies that there is any comparable standard for desire such that desires would be correct or accurate if they matched up with that standard. As the subjectivist sees it, the value of the various options for an agent is determined by that agent's informed concerns; not already there to guide such concerns. Putting it this way combines the two central subjectivist theses. The first is that there are no value facts that should (or could) serve as standards for desire. The second is that, suitably dressed up, desires can have (or be the only source of) practical normative authority.

2. Subjectivists' Focus on Errors of Theoretical Reason

However we understand them, an ordinary person will have, at best, imperfect access to the concerns that subjectivists most plausibly take to be relevant to her reasons. The satisfaction of some of our actual introspectable concerns can leave the taste of dust in our mouths. Thus it has become standard for subjectivists to offer a counterfactual analysis of the vantage point from which it is alleged that our concerns determine our reasons.[4] Our subjectivist must suggest that there is a way we could be such that our attitudes determine our reasons.[5] And once on this path there is a tendency for the analysis to become wildly counterfactual to the extent that a typical view now would suggest that our relevant attitudes at least have to be shaped in the light of complete factual information about the universe.[6]

Scanlon (1998, Ch. 1). For arguments against this view see Copp and Sobel (2002, especially pp. 269-272). See also Scanlon's reply to this paper in (2002).

[4] Interestingly, while different subjectivists argue for different vantage points, they each tend to offer a single description of this vantage point such that for each agent she only counts as properly situated if she gets herself into that vantage point. There is room to wonder if this one-size fits all understanding of the vantage point is compatible with the commitments of subjectivism. See Connie Rosati (1996, pp. 247-273) for an interesting discussion and an alternative to the one-size fits all model.

[5] Donald Hubin (1996, pp. 31-54) offers a subjectivist position that claims that our current actual intrinsic concerns determine our reasons. I take it, however, that Hubin allows that we have only imperfect access to such concerns.

[6] This tendency might be thought to start with Mill's competent judges test (which is admittedly offered as an account of well-being, not reasons) and run through Sidgwick (1981, pp. 111-122), Brandt (1979, pp. 10, 113, 329), Hare (1981, pp. 101-105 and

The wilder the counterfactuals become, the clearer it is that such accounts do not aspire, in the first instance, to tell people what kind of thoughts should enter into their heads in everyday practical reasoning. Just as consequentialism is best understood as a theory about the truth-maker of moral claims, and thus is compatible with recommending a decision-procedure for ethical situations that does not simply mimic the thought process invoked at the level of truth-maker, so too can this happen in the case of subjectivist accounts of reasons for action.

Understanding subjectivism this way we can say, seemingly with Hume and Williams, that an agent who deliberates sensibly given her epistemic situation might nonetheless fail to act according to her genuine reasons because her deliberation involved factual errors. Such rational but not ideally informed deliberation might fail to lead one to see one's genuine reasons even if one's factual premises were mistaken in a way that is not culpable.[7] On such a conception, it is clear why pride of place would be given to factual mistakes in explaining how an agent might come to act contrary to her true reasons.

And indeed, influential subjectivist accounts of reasons for action, such as those nearly offered by Hume and Bernard Williams, when they explain how an agent could act contrary to her true reasons for action, tend to focus attention on cases in which the agent has been misled by false factual information. Hume discusses an example in which a fruit-fancier acts contrary to reason in trying to get a certain fruit because she does not realize that the fruit is rotten (Hume 1967, p. 460). Williams fixes on a case in which a person acts contrary to her reasons in drinking a petrol and tonic because the agent falsely believes that what she is about to drink is a gin and tonic (Williams 1981, pp. 102-103). In neither of these cases do these authors provide any reason to suspect that the mislead agents were foolish or gullible in deciding to take these actions. The main problem in these cases appears to be merely that the agents had, perhaps non-culpably, false beliefs.

214-216). See also Senor and Fotion (1990, pp. 217-218), Williams (1981) as well as his (1995), Griffin (1986, pp. 11-17), Rawls (1971, pp. 407-424), Gauthier (1986, Ch. 2), Darwall (1983, Part II), Harsanyi (1982, p. 55), Railton (1986, pp. 5-31), Lewis (1989, pp. 113-137), Kagan (1989, Ch. 8). Several important caveats apply to some of the above author's commitments to subjectivism and some would decline the label.

[7] I argued that we should so understand subjectivism, or at least the strand of subjectivism about reasons for action that people connect with Hume and Williams in (2001). See also Railton (1997, especially pp. 60-61 and 77-78) and Hubin (1996, p. 51).

3. The Worry

Generally, subjectivists have focused on the information component of ideal deliberation, not paying adequate attention to other aspects of ideal deliberation.[8] For example, Peter Railton's quasi-official statement of his account of a person's good runs like this: "an individual's good consists in what he would want himself to want, or to pursue, were he to contemplate his present situation from a standpoint fully and vividly informed about himself and his circumstances, and entirely free of cognitive error or lapses of instrumental rationality." I take it that the "lapses of instrumental rationality" clause only has teeth after the account has determined what the agent wants in the relevant way. That is, on such an account it is the special sort of concerns that set the end, and only after the end is set is it possible to fail to be instrumentally rational. Further, I take it that the "cognitive error" clause speaks to the agent's informational input rather than to processing issues (Railton 1986, p. 16).[9]

Hume at times denied the need for an account of good processing, suggesting that once the information component was ideal the processing would take care of itself (Hume 1967, p. 416). But Williams suggests that the subjectivist should have something to say not only about the truth of the ideal deliberator's beliefs, but also about how she processes her true beliefs in generating her concerns. For example, Williams claims that the sound deliberator must use her imagination, and presumably he means use her imagination well, which is something she might fail to do. So Williams presumably sees the need for an account of good information processing which will include at least an account of good uses of imagination.[10]

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[8] Some have claimed that subjectivists lack resources to motivate even the information requirement. I will here ignore this complaint.

[9] I do not mean to suggest that Railton utterly ignored the possibility of processing errors. He does, however, allow that his focus is "on the problem of full information rather than full rationality" (Railton 1986).

[10] Williams offers a laundry list of examples of good processing that the sound deliberator should go in for in (1981, pp. 104-105). I take it that each example has a flip side. That is, each offers an example of ways that the deliberator could have processed poorly but did not. Thus each of Williams's examples serves as a counter-example to Korsgaard's claim that the Humean cannot make sense of less than ideal reasoning. Korsgaard's claim that the subjectivist cannot offer a normative account of rationality or ideal rationality ignores the fact that Williams offers exactly that. She seems not to keep an eye out for the ways in which Humeans can and do differ from Hume. Of course if each of Williams's examples were susceptible of being understood as really just an error of theoretical reason this would undermine the thought that Williams's examples refute Korsgaard's claim. My

But there are several concerns one might have with Williams's account of good processing. First, he offers only headings under which he claims there can be good or bad processing, he does not himself show us how to distinguish between good and bad processing under these headings. He does imply that the subjectivist can make sense of and underwrite the distinction between good and bad kinds of processing, but this is merely claimed, not demonstrated. Second, and somewhat related to the first worry, Williams's account of reasons is remarkably vague. Williams's efforts are only to offer an account of pro tanto reasons, not to give any account of the relative strength of reasons. Further, he officially offers only a necessary condition for having pro tanto status. Thirdly, it is not clear that Williams's account of the headings under which the subjectivist should say that there can be good and bad processing are correct. It seems that many, if not all, of Williams's headings point us to mistakes that are best understood as mistakes of theoretical reason rather than mistakes of processing.

Thus, for example, it might be claimed that Williams' favored case of excellence in processing, namely good use of imagination, is just standing in for a full appreciation of the facts, propositional and phenomenological, together with a lively appreciation of the full variety of options that are truly available at various junctures. And a failure here is just a failure of ideal theoretical reason. Thus, although Williams seems to recognize the need for an account of ideal processing, he offers little help in developing such an account. Still less should we be persuaded that Williams has identified and offered fixes for the full range of possible errors in processing.

In sum, the best subjectivist-friendly accounts of ideal deliberation have been much clearer and helpful in developing the information component of ideal deliberation and have largely ignored the challenges involved in developing an account of ideal processing.

But it is surely intuitively quite plausible to think that there must be another way for an agent to act contrary to her reasons besides not knowing the facts. It seems that we must be able to make sense of the possibility of an agent knowing the facts yet still making mistakes in her deliberation. Cases of weakness of will are merely the most obvious example. It seems we need a second way that a person can act contrary to her reasons besides merely having poor informational input into deliberation. An adequate account of practical reason, it would certainly

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point is merely that it is odd that Korsgaard did not feel called upon to make out a case that Williams list of examples of faulty processing does not put pressure on her claim that the subjectivist can offer no such examples.

seem, must be able to make sense of the possibility of poor processing of good information. Only when good information is combined with good processing should we have any confidence that the resulting concerns determine the agent's reason. If there can be such a thing as faulty processing of good information, then a subjectivist theory would have to ensure that none of this went on in generating the concerns that are alleged to determine an agent's reasons.

Thus the availability of the general claim that an adequate account of practical reason must make room for the possibility of practical errors in processing, but that subjectivist accounts are uniquely ill situated to provide for such a possibility. This paper will principally be an investigation into the force of this critique of subjectivism.

One reason a subjectivist seems ill positioned to distinguish between good and bad processing is that the subjectivist is committed to the idea that no end is so crazy that a person could not have a reason to go in for such a thing. Thus the subjectivist must not say that any processing that leads to the conclusion that one should spend one's life counting blades of grass is necessarily faulty. Subjectivists cannot tar action as contrary to reason simply because it is aimed at any particular target. Another explanation for the supposition that the subjectivist cannot offer an adequate account of processing errors is that the subjectivist is sometimes held to be committed to the thought that the only way information can appropriately impact on one's desires is causally. Thus the subjectivist could not say that a bit of true information had such and such a causal impact on an agent's desires, but that it ought not to have had such an effect.

On the other hand, it is unclear and under-discussed what forms of bad processing exist once we ignore or overcome all errors of theoretical reason. The complaint against subjectivism that it cannot capture the distinction between good and bad processing requires both explicating a non-question-begging (or at least obvious) example of poor processing and arguing that subjectivists lack the resources to accommodate adequately the possibility of such poor processing.[11]

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[11] The issue of what resources are available to the subjectivist is vexing because it requires understanding what moves are continuous with (or at least not at odds with) the general subjectivist framework. This is difficult because subjectivists have not been sufficiently forthcoming about what motivates their project such that we could then infer what moves would be compatible with it and what moves would not. Further, critics of subjectivism have been singularly unimaginative in their understanding of what motivates subjectivism and have assumed that only a very narrow range of moves are available to the subjectivist. At the beginning of this paper I mentioned (albeit too briefly) a few core

Christine Korsgaard called our attention to the need for subjectivists to make sense of processing failures, as well as potential troubles they may have in doing so, in two influential papers (Korsgaard 1996 and 1997). But Korsgaard chose to champion, at least in the more recent of these two papers, the most sweeping complaint one could make in this area. She argues that subjectivists cannot offer accounts of practical reason that can serve as guides that we might fail to follow. That is, she claimed that subjectivists cannot offer an account of our reasons that can tell us to do what we might not do.[12] She writes, "the empiricist [Humean] account explains how instrumental reason can motive us, but at the price of making it impossible to see how they could function as requirements or guides" (1997, p. 219). Korsgaard claims that Humeans lack the resources to make sense of a notion of good deliberation that could recommend an action that we might not choose. Thus her claim encompasses the claim that subjectivists can make no room for any errors in processing, but it is much broader still.

I think this claim of Korsgaard's is fairly obviously mistaken. But we should not let Korsgaard's extreme claim distract us from the important issue that her work helps us to see. The important question is whether or not the subjectivist can make sense of, and motivate a method of overcoming, all the kinds of errors of processing that there are. If there are kinds of errors that are possible in processing that subjectivists lack the resources to overcome, then subjective accounts still suffer a seemingly decisive objection. Korsgaard's claim was bolder than it needed to be to make real trouble for the subjectivist. Here I will investigate the merits of the more cautious, and more genuinely worrisome, version of the Korsgaardian objection against subjectivism.

The subjectivist project is to construct a vantage point for *P* from which a specified sort of concern determines *P*'s reasons. If, even from the subjectivist's preferred vantage point, it is possible that mistakes in processing occur in the generation of the specified sort of concern, then it is hard to see how the resulting concerns could track, let alone determine, *P*'s reasons. Thus our subjectivist seems forced to aspire to construct a vantage point from which such errors are impossible. The worry is that this cannot be pulled off within the subjectivist framework.

To make progress on this issue, we will need to get some handle on the kinds of errors in processing that an account of practical reason must

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commitments that subjectivists share that could help structure the debate about whether this or that proposal is compatible with it.

[12] I take issue directly with Korsgaard's arguments for this claim in part two of my (2001b).

accept if it is to be adequate. Further, I want to explore the variety of ways that subjectivists have attempted to make room for such processing errors. Some subjectivists simply deny the problem, while others radically refashion their views in hopes of accommodating the possibility of such errors in processing. My attention will be focused on the question of whether or not subjective accounts are undermined because they are unable to offer an adequate response to the real distinction between good and bad processing. My main question is whether or not the subjectivist's resources are adequate to the job. Thus it is relevant both what resources we think the subjectivist has and how big the task is. Understanding how big the task is will be to understand what kinds of processing errors there can be. As I have said, I will conclude tentatively that it seems that the subjectivist's resources are adequate to the task.

4. Ideal Rationality, Not Ordinary Rationality

As has been said, the thought that an account of practical reason must make room for errors in processing can be addressed against a subjectivist account offered as a truth-maker of reasons claims. The thought would then be the subjectivist cannot offer a plausible account of the truth-maker in this area because their account of the truth-maker ignores the genuine possibility of processing errors. Thus it is likely to give wrong answers about the reasons people have. And if this is so, then subjectivism cannot be a good account of the truth-maker of reason claims.

This is to say that the subjectivist needs an account of good processing as part of their account of the truth-maker of reasons claims. But if this is what the subjectivist needs it would be a mistake to think of the needed account of good processing as simply an account of rationality, where rationality is conceived of as, among other things, a matter of making sensible uses of information in the real world. Let us call deliberation "ordinary rational" if, given time-constraints and sensible heuristics and biases that an agent might adopt to counter-act predicable patterns of human weakness in deliberation, the agent's deliberation in light of available information was good. Let us call deliberation "ideally rational" if it counts as perfect when we make no excuses for time-constraints or sensibly imposed heuristics and biases and such.[13]

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[13] For a similar point see Railton (1986, p. 16), where he writes: "A fully informed and rational individual would, for example, have no use or desire for psychological strategies

What the subjectivist needs, according to the argument under consideration, is an account of ideal processing to go with her account of ideal information if she is to be able to offer a plausible account of the truth-maker of reason claims.[14] For if the topic of subjectivism is what an agent really has reason to do, and not merely what it makes sense for her to conclude that she has reason to do given her epistemic situation and time-constraints, then what the subjectivist needs is an account of ideal rationality or ideal processing.

Thus our subjectivist need not concern herself with cases in which a person processes sensibly given time constraints, uncertainty and such but fails to have a concern for that which she truly has a practical reason. If it is appropriate to call cases of this type of thing an error of practical reason, it is a kind of error that the subjectivist need not worry about in offering an account of the truth-maker of reason claims. Most obviously, subjectivists should remove considerations about the cost of deliberation and time pressures in arriving at a decision from playing a role in ideal processing. Understanding what the subjectivist's target notion needs to be helps us see which complaints are on topic and which are not.

5. Alleged Processing Errors and Subjectivist Replies

There are three general responses the subjectivist might have to a purported kind of error of practical processing, namely rejection, indifference, and attempted accommodation. Rejection involves the claim that the purported processing error is no real error at all. Alternatively, the subjectivist could allow that a purported error of processing is a real error, but claim that such errors are powerless to undermine the subjectivist's central claim and thus that subjectivists do not need to provide a fix for such errors. Call this response "indifference." Finally, the subjectivist might allow that the purported error is a genuine error and that, left uncorrected, such an error would undermine the subjectivist program, and thus attempt to find a subjectivist friendly fix for the kind of error involved. The remainder of this paper will consider various alleged possible errors of practical processing along with at least one of the three above subjectivist responses.

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suited to circumstances of limited knowledge and rationality [. . .]."
[14] I assume throughout, unless otherwise mentioned, that the best subjectivist accounts will involve an idealized information component.

6. Weakness of Will

Our subjectivist might claim to be indifferent to some allegedly problematic cases. The most obvious case here would be weakness of will. Plausibly it does not matter for the truth of the subjectivist's theory whether weakness of will is possible or not. Of course it is possible, but our subjectivist should claim that this does not matter because weakness of will locates problems in choices rather than concerns and the subjectivist account makes use only of concerns, not choices, in the construction of her theory. Thus our subjectivist should claim that they can be indifferent to the possibility of errors of practical processing that are due to weakness of will because such errors, even if they are allowed to be possible, could not undermine the subjectivist account.

As I mentioned above, Christine Korsgaard is perhaps the contemporary philosopher who has most urgently pressed the subjectivist on the topic of providing an account of errors in processing. In (1996) she argues that "there is no reason to deny that human beings might be practically irrational in the sense that Hume considers impossible: that, even with the truth at our disposal, we might from one cause or another fail to be interested in the means to our ends" (p. 321). Rather, she claims, the Humean skeptic about practical reason "ought to allow for at least one form of true irrationality, namely, failure to be motivated by the consideration that the action is the means to your end" (p. 319). Let us call this error weakness of will. There is no critique here of the end, rather only a critique of the agent's failure effectively to pursue it. But then there can be no problem for the subjectivist account in this neighborhood. The subjectivist uses the agent's concerns to construct an account of the appropriate end for an agent. The subjectivist should say that the agent has a reason to take action to best achieve her ends as determined by her concerns. If the agent fails to do this, she has, by the subjectivist's lights, failed to act in accord with her reasons. Problems in acting in ways that best achieve our concerns will not alter the subjectivist account of what a person has reason to do.

Korsgaard, in the earlier paper, allows that the Humean, as opposed to Hume, has the resources to make room for such weakness of will. Yet, she claims that "once this kind of irrationality is allowed in the means/ends case, some of the grounds for skepticism about more ambitious forms of practical reasoning will seem less compelling" (p. 321). Her main point in invoking the possibility of true irrationality was to argue that a plausible account must say that our reasons motivate us insofar as we are rational, not that our reasons necessarily motivate us

even when we are irrational. The example of weakness of will is used to show that even knowing the facts a person might be irrational and so unmoved by her reasons. I have no quarrel with this claim (except I would say a person might count as rational and still be unmoved by her reasons because she might unculpably lack pertinent information). However, Korsgaard suggests that the subjectivist will have a hard time making room for weakness of will without opening the floodgates to non-subjectivist elements and it is this claim that I am resisting.

The subjectivist, of course, needs an account of which of an agent's concerns are authoritative and which are not. And, of course, it is contentious whether or not the subjectivist can adequately provide such an account. But this is not the objection here under consideration. For the problem of weakness of will only occurs after the authoritative ends have been identified. Thus, let it here be granted that the subjectivist has adequately made out this distinction. Thus imagine a case in which the authoritative concerns tell one to *X* but other, less authoritative concerns tell one to *Y*. Is it problematic for a subjectivist account that a person might knowingly choose an option at the urging of a less authoritative desire?

I think this cannot be problematic for the subjectivist. If the story is spelled out as I have it above, the subjectivist obviously suggests that it is the authoritative concerns that make it the case that one has most reason to *X*. To think that weakness of will is problematic for subjectivist accounts one must think either that subjectivists need to adopt the implausible "revealed" accounts of preference or concerns, in which what one chooses determines what one cares about or that it is impossible to care about an end without being motivated to take the means to that end. But subjectivists are far from being tied to such an account of concerns.[15] An agent's concerns might well determine her reasons even if weakness of will keeps her from acting in accord with those reasons. Because weakness of the will locates problems in choices rather than concerns it is powerless to constitute an objection to subjective accounts that claim it is an agent's concerns that ground her reasons. Genuinely problematic cases of processing errors for the subjectivist must occur before the appropriate end has been determined.

Even someone convinced by my claim tha weakness of will cannot create problems for subjectivist accounts of reasons for action might balk at my use of Korsgaard in this connection. After all, the conclusion of her argument is that subjectivists lack the resources to develop an account of

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[15] Korsgaard does seem to claim that subjectivists are tied to a revealed account of a person's preferences. For compelling arguments against this view, see Hubin (2001).

rationality according to which people sometimes act irrationally. One could read Korsgaard two different ways. First, one could claim that her topic is not my notion of a reason at all, and her central claim involves problems that subjectivists have with rationality. I have addressed this reading elsewhere (Sobel 2001b, Part II, subsection C). Amongst the costs of this reading are that, I have argued, it has Korsgaard failing to address the views of Hume and Williams who are developing accounts of reasons. Secondly, one could see Korsgaard's argument to be addressed against a subjectivist account of the truth-maker of reason claims and claiming that there is a problem with the practical processing component of any such account. I am here reading Korsgaard in this latter way. On this view one would be right to see Korsgaard as addressing the question of ideal practical processing and claiming that problems for the subjectivist in this neck of the woods scuttles the subjectivist's account of reasons for action.

Gavin Lawrence argues differently to the conclusion that subjectivism founders in accounting for weakness of will.

> Thus over ends there is, for example, the practical irrationality of akrasia, viewed as the irrationality of agents' pursuing an end, whose efficient attainment they may calculate, but which they believe (truly or falsely) they ought not to be pursuing in the first place – since, they suppose, the good thing for them to do is something else. This description of akrasia essentially involves the idea of a kind of rational end assessment which the ER [End-Relative aka neo-Humean instrumentalism] conception rejects. Akrasia so characterized would then not be a possible practical irrationality on ER; indeed notoriously those ER theorists wishing to allow akrasia's existence have faced considerable problems in giving a description of it that both intuitively captures the phenomenon and preserves some sense of its practical *irrationality*. (Lawrence 1995, pp. 128-129)

Presumably the thought is that thinking to oneself that the good thing for me to do is this rather than that is already a thought that the subjectivist cannot make sense of. Lawrence seems to claim that thinking that the good thing for me to do is *X* rather than *Y* already brings with it the kind of rational end assessment that the subjectivist has rejected. But consider a person who believes a subjectivist theory, according to which her desires give her reasons. This is, of course, someone who thinks that subjectivism offers a good account of what they have reason to do. Such a person will develop views about what they ought to be doing (according to the theory) and occasionally feel tempted to do otherwise (unless the subjectivist view in question implausibly claims that it is the

desire that pushes her the strongest at the moment that is always the authoritative concern). Thus this person will think that there are things that they ought not to be pursuing. This person can think to herself that the wisest choice would be *A* and that she should stop being tempted by *B*. And this person could give in and choose *B*. Isn't this weakness of will seen as practical irrationality within a subjectivist framework?

Perhaps the subjectivist is thought to be unable to move from what I have so far claimed is compatible with the view to the thought that doing what the agent thinks is wise is "the good thing for me to do." But if this phrase does not receive a special philosophical gloss, it is just the sort of thing our convinced subjectivist might say about the option that is recommended by the view of practical reason she accepts.

Subjectivism is a theory of reason for action. It is compatible with the thought that reasons can have different weights and that one's reasons are not determined by one's current most oppressive craving. This, it seems to me, is all that is needed to make akrasia a possible way of being irrational within a subjectivist framework. Thus I have argued that

(1)   subjectivists can make room for weakness of will and offer at least an initially plausibly explanation of it;
(2)   the existence of weakness of will is powerless to constitute an objection to the philosophically popular variant of subjectivism that ties reasons to concerns rather than choices.

Thus I think weakness of will cannot be an example of poor practical processing that makes trouble for the subjectivist story of reasons for action. No doubt a complete practical theory should have something to say about rationality as well as reasons, and it would be a problem for the broadly Humean program if there could be no sensible account of rationality within such a framework. I do not see any reason to think that subjectivism is incompatible with a sensible account of rationality, but here I have only been at pains to point out that in any case, subjectivist accounts of reasons for action are safe from worries stemming from weakness of will.

7. Going Haywire

Korsgaard helpfully puts forward another line of thought to the effect that subjectivists cannot make sense of the difference between good and bad processing. She writes,

> But as Nagel points out in *The Possibility of Altruism*, the specifically rational character of going to the dentist to avert an unwanted toothache depends on how the belief and the desire are 'combined'. It is certainly not enough to say that they jointly *cause* the action, or that their bare co-presence effects a motive, for a person might be conditioned so that he responds in totally crazy ways to the co-presence of certain beliefs and desires. In Nagel's own example, a person has been conditioned so that whenever he wants a drink and believes the object before him is a pencil sharpener, he wants to put a coin into the pencil sharpener. Here the co-presence of belief and desire reliably lead to a certain action, but the action is a mad one. One might be tempted to say that a soda machine, unlike a pencil sharpener, is the source of a drink, so that the right kind of conceptual connection between the desire and the belief obtains. But so far that is only to note a fact about the relationship between the belief and the desire themselves, and that says nothing about the rationality of the *person* who is influenced by them. If the belief and the desire still operate on that person merely by having a certain causal efficacy when co-present, the rational action is only accidentally or externally different from the mad one. After all, a person may be conditioned to do the correct thing as well as the incorrect thing; but the correctness of what she is conditioned to do does not make *her* any more rational. (Korsgaard 1997, pp. 220-221)

Donald Hubin has offered considerations that put a similar kind of pressure on the subjectivist. Hubin points out that we can make sense of a bit of factual input into practical deliberation causing the agent to "go haywire." We could imagine that, as a causal matter, some bits of information produce wild results in a person's motivations. Just as some computer chips years ago were disposed to make wild calculations upon receipt of certain inputs, we can make sense of this as a possibility in agents as well.

Hubin supposes that the possibility of this sort of problem undermines only certain versions of subjectivism. He seems to think that such a possibility would undermine informed desire subjectivist accounts but would not undermine subjectivist accounts that fixed on "intrinsic actual" desires. I take it the thought is that the counterfactual deliberation might trigger some such instance of going haywire and so subjectivist accounts that look to our (counterfactually) informed desires must be able to distinguish what counts as going haywire from making sensible use of information. Hubin's story involves a tacit skepticism about the possibility of the subjectivist managing to mark such a distinction using an informed desire account (Hubin 1996). As Hubin sees it, his own actual intrinsic desire account has an advantage over counterfactual desire accounts in that the former need not worry about such glitches.

The reason he thinks his account is immune to such problems is that if a glitch caused one to have an actual intrinsic desire, Hubin is willing to say that this glitch has changed what one has reason to do (Hubin, conversation). But, obviously, the fact that I would have a glitch if I considered certain information, does not mean that these counterfactual glitches affect what my reasons are prior to the glitch.

Hubin's actual intrinsic desire account suggests a subjectivism that might have some advantages over informed desire accounts.[16] Thus, his account might offer help to the subjectivist in making clear how they can explain and accommodate the possibility of poor processing. Yet I am tempted to think that if Hubin's "haywire" objection were telling against informed desire versions of subjectivism, that it would likely be telling against his intrinsic actual account since, I suspect, facts about what a person would want in non-actual circumstances will play a role in determining what a person actually intrinsically wants. And if so, then the worry about counterfactual glitches will reoccur. I want to not, as much as possible, take a stand about what the best version of subjectivism looks like. But so far I do not see how the glitch point could doom informed desire accounts without dooming actual intrinsic desire accounts as well.

Richard Arneson explicitly picks up Hubin's complaint and finds it sufficiently forceful to justify abandoning subjectivism. Arneson, in discussing subjectivist theories of well-being, writes:

> It might simply be a brute psychological fact about me that if I were to become fully informed about grapes, this process would set off a chemical process in my brain that would lead me to crave counting blades of grass on courthouse lawns as my primary life aim. This would seem to

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[16] Hubin, as I understand him, is tempted by expressivism about all things considered judgments about reason claims. A person could attempt to combine subjectivism and expressivism is different ways. One model would mimic the combination of utilitarianism with expressivism about morality. Here the idea would be, I take it, that one's normative ethical view was utilitarian but one was a meta-ethical expressivist. Absent tricky moves, on such a view one would admit, when wearing one's meta-ethical hat, that none of one's normative-ethical claims was literally true or false. Alternatively, one could combine the two by having subjectivism speak to a subset of the concerns that feed into an all things considered judgment about what there is most reason to do, but be an expressivist, or at any rate non-cognitivist, about judgements of how to combine such subsets into all things considered judgements about what there is reason to do. I believe that both David Copp and Hubin hold this latter sort of view. Copp's "needs and values principle of self-grounded reasons" tells a quasi-subjectivist story about what he calls "self-grounded reasons" but Copp denies that there are facts about what one has reason to do all things considered, and even denies that the question of what one has reason to do all things considered is in good order. See Copp (1997, pp. 86-106).

> be an oddity of my brain, not an indicator of my true well-being. (Arneson 1999, p. 134)

Many of the examples that people offer of glitches are cases in which either the outcome of deliberation seems crazy or there seems to be a lack of relevance between the consideration and the resulting concern. Why should it be thought that subjectivists can not make room for a notion of relevance of a consideration to a concern and suggest that the authoritative concerns are those that are arrived at only by relevant considerations? Offhand, it seems continuous with subjectivism to say that it is only desires that arise as a result of appreciation of the object that carry authority. Desires for a life of grass counting that arise causally from consideration of grapes need not count for the subjectivist as authoritative. This would involve developing a subjectivist friendly notion of relevance.[17] Now as far as I know no one, neither subjectivists or objectivists, have a worked out notion of relevance that could underwrite the distinction between glitchy and non-glitchy processing. My goal for now is simply to point out that some notions of relevance could seem subjectivist friendly.

Note that crucially this notion of relevance would have to be what I will call procedural rather than output driven. That is, it does not presuppose that certain objects or options are more intrinsically worthy of being desired than others and then count deliberation as rational only if it leads to those objects. Rather, the thought here is neutral with respect to what can sensibly be desired after this process. Similarly a typical subjectivist requirement that one's desires be transitive is procedural rather than substantive. Such requirements put constraints on coherent patterns of concerns, but do not rule out patterns because they involve this or that element. Procedural requirements on authoritative desires can, of course, be implausible. Consider the procedural requirement that all and only desires on Tuesdays have authority. And of course there can be implausible versions of subjectivism. The thought here is just that procedural requirements on authoritative desires are compatible with a thoroughgoing subjectivism.

The subjectivist denies that an agent's reaction counts as a glitch merely because it is for a strange thing. If the objection under consideration were merely that subjectivists sometimes tolerate the thought that people have reason to go in for strange things then all this talk about glitches would be unnecessary. That is, if glitches are

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[17] As will become clear, I do not aspire to offer here such an account. I merely mean to question why the possibility of such an account might feel closed to a subjectivist.

attributed retrospectively upon seeing what the deliberation hit on, then it is not the thought of a glitch that drives the resistance to subjectivism, but rather the thought that certain ends are rationally mandatory (or at least that certain ends are rationally forbidden). So I will ignore retrospectively attributed glitches as they just follow from the rejection of subjectivism rather than motivating it.

How then could we best capture an intrinsic rather than derivative or retrospective notion of a glitch? That is, what would make a bit of processing count as intrinsically glitchy? I think this is a harder question than it looks. Again, my main concern is to suggest that the subjectivist is in no worse of a position to acknowledge whatever genuine glitchyness that might exist. So the task of a person who wants to use the notion of a glitch against the subjectivist must be to bring forth cases that genuinely count as glitches and show that subjectivists lack the resources to so categorize them.

Here is one possibility. Suppose that there are proper ways for the brain to function and glitchy ways for the brain to function and that in principle brain scientists can tell us whether or not a particular deliberative process involved a brain glitch. If this is so, and if the scientists categorize a glitch procedurally, based not on the output of desire but on the causal process itself, then presumably the subjectivist could simply accept that it is the desires that would be produced under the appropriate conditions where no such glitches are involved. Such a notion of a glitch brings with it no presuppositions about what a person must want in order to be glitch free. If the scientist categorized glitches based on outputs of deliberation we would again be back to the starting point of the dispute between subjectivists and objectivists, not in possession of a powerful argument for objectivism. Thus, as far as I can see, the possibility of glitches of the sort our objectors have mentioned would not undermine the plausibility of subjectivism. Procedural glitches are compatible with subjectivism and output glitches have not yet been shown to offer obvious cases of problematic processing.

I take it that Kantians typically want to have a procedural account of good processing as well since they want it to be the case that practical reasoning does not find normative facts but creates them. We are free insofar as we guide ourselves by giving ourselves laws rather than having laws imposed from without. But if this is so, Kantians need a procedural account of good processing just as subjectivists do. So accommodating glitches within a procedural account of good processing is a task for subjectivists and Kantians alike. As far as I see, we have no arguments before us that objectivists are better positioned to be able to capture the

wanted notion of an intrinsic glitch. And attributing a glitch where deliberation hits on things that are held to be necessarily irrational simply begs the question against subjective accounts.

8. Acculturated Desires

A familiar criticism of subjectivism is that it founders because what we desire is a function of what we are used to, think plausible, or already believe good. Thus the person brought up to believe that she is not worthy of a vote or not worthy of being touched by "better" types of people might not form desires to vote or be seen and touched without shame. She might "not dare" to desire certain things that she has been taught are not appropriate to someone such as herself. Thus the desires of such ill used people will reflect their horrendous upbringing and not reflect what such people really have reason to do. This, I suppose, might be said to be one sort of common processing error.

Subjectivists have a variety of responses to this objection. First, and perhaps most importantly, typically part of the idealization process that subjectivists recommend is having one's false beliefs discredited and being confronted with true beliefs. Now typically the kind of situation I have described will be rife with factually erroneous beliefs.

Further, typically in such cases our worry is that an agent might lack sufficient familiarity with various options or not feel it their place to investigate certain sorts of options. The subjectivist account should suggest that it is only after an agent has been exposed to the full variety of ways that she might live that her concerns are authoritative.[18] Thus worries that she might have crimped desires due to lack of appreciation of the wonders of the options that she has not come across in real life, or worries about how she might not feel it her place to experience some ways of life, are simply out of place.

Of course it can happen that as a result of a horrendous upbringing an agent lacks reason to pursue that which she would have had a reason to pursue but for the upbringing. Such experiences can change what we have reason to do. If those options that she would have had a reason to pursue no longer resonate with her when she gives them a fair trial, she might well have lost her reason to go in for such things. It is a strength of the subjectivist story that it allows for the possibility that severely damaged people might have importantly different reasons than the rest of

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[18] There are, I think, real problems with the typical "full information" account of the authoritative vantage point. See Velleman (1988), my (1994), and Rosati (1995).

us. Further, even if the subjectivist story can explain why a particular person has a reason to be able to be seen in public without shame, it may yet be that such an agent has most reason to keep her head down and not fight the system so as to avoid being pummeled. Or she may not, depending on her concerns.

9. Failures to Live Up to the Aristotelian Virtues

The subjectivist might reject some kinds of alleged errors of practical processing as not genuinely errors at all. Undoubtedly this would be the typical subjectivist's attitude towards the claim that the Aristotelian virtues are excellences of practical processing, such that one makes a practical error if one fails to act virtuously. If this were true, then subjectivism would have to be mistaken. Our subjectivist will no doubt claim that virtues such as generosity or bravery, while they may typically tend to make others love us (which almost all in fact care about) or tend to help us achieve our projects whatever they may be, nonetheless have no necessary connection to excellence in practical processing.[19] This rejection will need defense, as will the claim that the rejection here is implausible.[20] The important question is whether or not we have here a clear case of poor processing. The issue is whether the claim that failures of virtue are necessarily failures of ideal rationality is clearly enough true that we can use this fact to shape our theory of reasons to fit it or if it is a contentious claim that simply counts as the rejection of subjectivism rather than a clear rationale for becoming a non-subjectivist. Bluntly, I do not think this claim is secure enough to serve as an Archemedian leverage point in this debate. This is not an argument that there could not

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[19] The example of bravery might suggest an alternative subjectivist strategy that I will not discuss. Our subjectivist might try to "appropriate" a given alleged case in which practical processing can go well or ill in ways that render it compatible with a subjectivist story. So our subjectivist might say that bravery is an excellence of practical processing but understand bravery in a way such that it, at least when combined with an ideal theoretical reason, necessarily helps one along in the accomplishment of one's concerns. Philippa Foot, in (1978), suggests a picture of some of the virtues that looks somewhat like this. She suggests that the virtues are names for ways of avoiding common errors in acting according to reason. So bravery is a virtue because we tend to fall away from what reason (independently) dictates when reason requires actions that are fearful. On this picture the virtues do not fix what one has reason to do, rather they are generally useful for getting us to do what reason has already picked out as the appropriate aim.

[20] The most thoughtful attempt that I know of to make out the case that failures of virtue are necessarily failures of ideal rationality is in Quinn (1993) and Hursthouse (1999, Part 3).

be an argument showing that virtue failures are failures of ideal rationality. It is merely an argument that absent such an argument, the claim under consideration is clearly not decisive.

10. Depression

The topic of depression and whether to think of it as a possible cause of errors of processing is interesting and I will be unable to address it adequately here. I will confine myself to two claims that seem fairly clear in this neighborhood.

First, the extent to which depression will be seen as a source of practical processing errors will likely hinge somewhat on what the subjectivist take the relevant attitude to be. If the relevant authority conferring attitude were thought to be a desiring, then it seems likely that depression could dampen and perhaps extinguish such concerns. On the other hand, if the relevant attitude were thought to be valuing, then arguably depressions ability to dampen or perhaps deaden desire need not be thought to necessarily affect the agent's valuations. Michael Smith, for example, argues that valuing is compatible with having no motivational desire for the object of positive valuation. Thus, depression and the like might have less ability to produce errors of processing if the relevant attitude is one of valuing.

Second, attitudes such as depression cause fairly systematic loss of affect and lively concern. A subjectivist could claim that attitudes that dampen or extinguish the relevant concern, without regard to its object, could be held to be pathologies that must be extinguished or circumvented if we are to get at the relevant authoritative concerns. That is, again the subjectivist could look to make a procedural case against depression rather than a outcome driven argument that it counts as or leads to, errors of practical processing.

11. Conclusion

The main question here is not the viability of this or that particular version of an informed desire account of reasons. The main question is whether we find kinds of errors in processing that subjectivists are in a worse position to acknowledge and accommodate than non-subjectivists. What we are looking for is a plausible account of what goes wrong when errors in processing occur that subjectivists cannot help themselves to. So

it seems we would need a clear example of a processing (not merely outcome) error and then have a case made that subjectivists are unable to count this as an error of processing. I don't see that we have candidates yet that purport to show all this.

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