

Forthcoming in *The Oxford Handbook of Reasons and Normativity*, ed. D. Star (Oxford University Press).

Constructivism About Reasons*

Nicholas Southwood

Constructivism about reasons (henceforth *constructivism*) is a label for a class of theories that hold that truths about reasons are somehow “constructed” out of our rational capacities. This intriguing idea has engaged the philosophical imagination at least since the time of the ancient Greeks. Plato (1993, ch. 2) thought it sufficiently important to give it an extended outing in Book 2 of the *Republic*, where a version of constructivism is expounded by Glaucon, one of Socrates’ less obtuse interlocutors. It was influentially revived by Thomas Hobbes (1994) in the 17th century and thereafter became a major philosophical player in the form of social contract theory (see also Locke 1988; Rousseau 1968). It was given perhaps the most detailed exposition and defense by Immanuel Kant (1998). And it remains a dominant force within contemporary moral and political philosophy thanks to the enduring influence of both Hobbes (in the work of e.g. David Gauthier (1986), Gilbert Harman (1975), and Sharon Street (2008; 2010; 2012)); and Kant (in the work of e.g. John Rawls (1971; 1980; 1993), Christine Korsgaard (1996a; 1996b; 2008; 2009), T. M Scanlon (1982; 1998), and Onora O’Neill (1989)).

Given constructivism’s enduring popularity and appeal, it is perhaps something of a surprise that there remains considerable uncertainty among many philosophers about what constructivism is even supposed to *be*. In their introduction to a recent volume on constructivism, for example, James Lenman and Yonatan Shemmer (2012, p. 1) note that while constructivism “has come to be a major theme in contemporary practical philosophy, ... it is not always clear how it is best understood.” In the same vein, David Enoch (2011, p. 319) complains that “it is surprisingly hard to even characterize the view.” The

* I have benefitted from discussions about the topic of this article with many people including Hugh Barrett, Garrett Cullity, Billy Dunaway, Tristram McPherson, Philip Pettit, François Schroeter, Laura Schroeter, Michael Smith, and Daniel Star. I am especially grateful to Daniel Star for detailed written comments. Research for the article was supported by DP120101507 and DP140102468.

problem is that, while the idea that truths about reasons are somehow “constructed” from our rational capacities is highly suggestive, it is also deeply elusive. There have been a number of interesting and instructive attempts to render it more precise. Yet, none, to my mind, is entirely satisfactory.

My aim in this article is to make some progress on the question of how constructivism should be understood. I shall assume that a satisfactory characterization of constructivism should be able to do at least three things. First, it should be able to *accommodate* the many, quite radically different constructivist theories and explain what *unifies* them by identifying some feature that they have in common. Second, it should also be able to explain what is *distinctive* of constructivism inasmuch as it suffices to *distinguish* the various constructivist theories from other non-constructivist theories. And, third, it should also be able to explain constructivism’s *prima facie appeal*. In part, this is simply a matter of diligent philosophical bookkeeping. More importantly, it is vital in order to evaluate the *success* of constructivism as an account of reasons. As we shall see, certain challenges that have been raised against constructivist theories are based on dubious understandings of constructivism. Other challenges only properly come into focus once a proper understanding is achieved.

The article is in five main sections. I will begin by saying something about what *kind* of theory constructivism is supposed to be (section 1). Next, I will consider and reject both the standard *proceduralist* characterization of constructivism (section 2) and also Sharon Street’s ingenious *standpoint* characterization (section 3). I will then suggest an alternative characterization according to which what is central is the role played by certain standards of *correct reasoning* (section 4). I will conclude by saying something about the implications of this account for evaluating the success of constructivism (section 5).

Before we begin, two brief clarificatory remarks. First, it is important to stress that my subject is exclusively constructivism about *normative reasons*. Normative reasons are, very roughly, considerations that *count in favour* of some response (see Scanlon 1998, p. 1), or that help to explain or determine the responses that we ought to have (see Broome 2013, ch. 4). I shall have nothing to

say here about so-called *motivating reasons*, which are, roughly, those considerations that help to explain or determine the responses that we in fact have (see Smith 1994, pp. 94-8).

The second clarificatory remark is that I shall focus almost exclusively on constructivism about *practical* reasons. Practical reasons are reasons for action, intention and decision. I shall have virtually nothing to say about theoretical reasons, namely, reasons for belief or other doxastic attitudes. This is due, in part, to constraints of space and to the fact that constructivists themselves have focused almost exclusively on practical reasons (though see Korsgaard 2009; Street 2009). It is also due, in part, to the fact that it is far from obvious how to extend what I take to be the most attractive version of constructivism to the theoretical domain.

1. What kind of theory is constructivism?

Constructivism is a theory about reasons, but what *kind* of theory is it supposed to be?

I suggest that all versions of constructivism can be thought of as offering a certain view of what *explains* or *determines*¹ in some sense *truths about reasons*.² Thus, constructivist theories are making claims about *truths* about reasons (i.e. about the *world*), as opposed to claims about the *concept* of a reason (i.e. about *meaning*), or claims about our *beliefs* about reasons. And constructivist theories purport to identify what *explains* or *determines* truths about reasons, as opposed to merely *espousing* such claims.

¹ I have in mind the non-epistemic sense of “explanation,” that is, the sense in which one truth (or fact) explains another truth (or fact). See Broome 2013, ch. 4.

² Compare this to Street’s answer to the question of what kind of theory constructivism is supposed to be. Street holds that constructivism is an account of what “the truth of a *normative claim consists in*” (Street 2010, p. 367: italics added), or what “normative truth ... [is] *constituted by*” (p. 365). Notice that my answer is different from Street’s in two respects. First, I take constructivism to be an account of what *explains* or *determines* normative truths, as opposed to what those truths *consist in* or *are constituted by*. What normative truths consist in or are constituted by is only *one* example of what explains or determines them (see below). Second, I take constructivism to be explaining *truths about reasons*, rather than *normative truths*. While as a historical matter constructivists have not always (explicitly) focused on reasons, I shall interpret them as such. Of course, some philosophers hold that normative truths just are truths about reasons (e.g. Joseph Raz (1999, p. 67) and T. M. Scanlon (1998, ch. 1)), but I don’t want to take a stand on that issue here.

This, I suggest, is what constructivist theories have in *common* in terms of the kind of theory they are. Of course, constructivist theories can also *differ* in terms of the kind of theory they are. There are different *kinds* of constructivism, as I shall put it. This is because there are different kinds of theories concerning what explains or determines truths about reasons. We can classify these in terms of the *scope* and *mode* of the explanations that they purport to identify of truths about reasons.

The question of *scope* concerns *which truths about reasons* are being explained. So-called “local” (or “restricted”) kinds of constructivism only purport to identify what explains some special class of truths about reasons.³ For example, Rawls’s (1971; 1993) constructivism purports to identify what explains truths about reasons of *social justice*. Gauthier’s (1986) constructivism purports to identify what explains truths about reasons of *morality*. Scanlon’s (1998) constructivism purports to identify what explains a special subset of truths about reasons of morality – what he calls truths about *what we owe to each other*. By contrast, “global” (or “thoroughgoing”) kinds of constructivism purport to identify some feature that explains *all* truths about reasons. Korsgaard (1996a; 1996b) and Street (2008; 2010) are at least global constructivists about *practical* reasons and both have attempted to extend their constructivism to the theoretical domain (see Korsgaard 2009; Street 2009).

The question of *mode* concerns the mode of explanation in relation to the relevant truths about reasons. What I shall call “normative” kinds of constructivism purport to identify *normative explanations* of the relevant truths about reasons. The normative explanation of truths about reasons (of some kind) is what *makes it the case* that one has reasons (of that kind); or *why* one has reasons (of that kind). The grounds of truths about reasons (of some kind) must themselves be truths about reasons (of that kind). Thus, Rawls’s constructivism is plausibly interpreted as a kind of normative constructivism, since it purports to give an account of what grounds specific truths about reasons of social justice, what makes social institutions just, or why just institutions are just, in terms of a

³ The “local”/“global” language is due to Enoch (2011, p. 323). The “restricted”/“thoroughgoing” language is due to Street (2010, pp. 367-9).

general truth about social justice: that a just society is one that exhibits the kind of impartiality required by the original position.

What I shall call “constitutive” kinds of constructivism purport to offer *constitutive explanations* of the relevant truths about reasons. A constitutive explanation of truths about reasons (of some kind) is what being a reason (of that kind) *consists in*: i.e. an account of the *nature* of reasons (of that kind), or *what it is* for a consideration to be a reason of that kind. Whatever constitutively explains truths about reasons (of some kind) cannot include truths about reasons (of that kind). Korsgaard (1996a) and Street (2008) seem to be offering accounts of what constitutively explains truths about (practical) reasons in general. Scanlon (1998) also seems to be (or at least says that he is) offering an account of what constitutively explains truths about morality (or what we owe to each other).

So there are four kinds of constructivism in conceptual space: *local normative constructivism*; *local constitutive constructivism*; *global normative constructivism*; and *global constitutive constructivism*. We shall return at length to *three* of these kinds of constructivism. (I shan’t have anything to say in what follows about global normative constructivism.) For the moment, it is worth just registering that this taxonomy of kinds of constructivism differs from, and I believe represents an improvement on, the more standard taxonomy that divides constructivism into “normative ethical” and “meta-ethical” kinds (see Street 2010; Enoch 2011). The main problem with the standard taxonomy, to my mind, is that it runs together local normative constructivism and local constitutive constructivism. As we shall see, these are importantly different positions that are subject to importantly different challenges.

2. The proceduralist characterization

So much for what *kind* of theory constructivism is. It is an account of what explains or determines in some sense relevant truths about reasons – with different kinds of constructivism differing in terms of scope and mode. I shall take rival characterizations of constructivism to be agreed on this point. But what *is* constructivism?

The standard answer is what Sharon Street (2010, p. 365) calls the “proceduralist characterization” of constructivism. According to the proceduralist characterization, constructivism understands relevant truths about reasons as somehow explained “by emergence from [some relevant actual or hypothetical] procedure.” The proceduralist characterization is extremely pervasive. For example, Stephen Darwall, Alan Gibbard and Peter Railton (1992) define constructivism as the view that “there are no [truths about reasons] independent of the finding that a certain hypothetical procedure would have such an such an upshot.” Carla Bagnoli (2011, p. 1) writes that constructivists hold that “normative truths ... are in some sense determined by an idealized process of rational deliberation, choice or agreement.” David Enoch (2011, p. 322) holds that constructivism about a relevant discourse is a thesis about the relation of “correctness-priority between substantive results and the procedures leading to them. ... [T]here are no substantive correctness criteria that apply to (or in) that discourse, and ... the only relevant correctness criteria are procedural.”

The basic idea behind the proceduralist characterization is perhaps best grasped by way of John Rawls’s influential notion of “pure procedural justice” (Rawls 1971, pp. 86-7). Cases of pure procedural justice are cases where “there is no independent criterion for the right result: instead there is a correct or fair procedure such that the outcome is likewise correct or fair, whatever it is, provided that the procedure has been properly followed” (Rawls 1971, p. 86). Rawls famously gives the example of gambling. “If a number of persons engage in a series of fair bets, the distribution of cash after each bet is fair, or at least not unfair, whatever this distribution is” (Rawls 1971, p. 86).⁴ This is a case of pure procedural justice because there is no procedure-independent standard of fairness in terms of which we can evaluate the state of affairs in which this or that gambler wins the cash. Rather, the fact that it is fair that, say, gambler A wins the cash is explained simply by the fact that this result is the product of the relevant procedure.

⁴ Rawls adds: “I assume here that fair bets are those having a zero expectation of gain, and that bets are made voluntarily, that no one cheats, and so on” (Rawls 1971, p. 86).

According to the proceduralist characterization, then, constructivism is essentially, as David Enoch (2011, p. 319) has helpfully put, “an attempt to generalize from ... the model of pure procedural justice ... It is an attempt to think of a whole class of normative facts as constructed in some analogous ways, so that their status as normative facts depends on their being the outcome of some specified procedure.” Thus, for example, Rawlsian constructivism holds that truths about social justice are explained by what would emerge from the procedure described by the original position. Scanlonian constructivism holds that truths about what we owe to each other are explained by what would emerge from the procedure of justifiability to others. Korsgardian constructivism holds that truths about practical reasons in general are explained by what would emerge from the procedure of reflective endorsement. And so on.

Recently, Sharon Street has raised a number of objections against the proceduralist characterization. I shall focus here on two of her objections.⁵ First, Street objects that the proceduralist characterization fails to explain what is *distinctive* about constructivism as a meta-ethical theory. In particular, it fails to distinguish constructivism from naturalistic versions of the ideal observer theory, which “seek to reduce normative facts to natural facts about the

⁵ Street also mentions an objection originally raised by Stephen Darwall, Alan Gibbard and Peter Railton (1992, p. 13), which holds that the proceduralist characterization is unable to accommodate metaethical versions of constructivism since constructivism, thus characterized, is not really a meta-ethical position at all. The problem is that “if one constructivist claims that normative truth is constituted by emergence from procedure *A*, and another claims that normative truth is constituted by emergence from some different procedure *B*, then it is difficult to see how this is anything but a substantive normative dispute, entirely compatible with any number of metaethical interpretations” (Street 2010, p. 365).

This strikes me as a mistake. Consider, by analogy, a dispute between two rival proceduralists about being “out” in cricket. Suppose that the first holds that truths about being “out” are explained by being the outcome of a procedure in which the umpire gives the batsman “out,” whereas the second holds that they are explained by being the outcome of a procedure in which the bowler’s appeal is above 100 decibels in volume. Clearly, this needn’t be a merely substantive dispute. It might very well instead be a dispute about the *nature* of being “out”; about what being “out” *consists in*; about *what it is* for a batsman to be “out.” It seems to me that we should say the same thing about the dispute between rival proceduralists about reasons. Thus, suppose that the first proceduralist holds that truths about reasons are explained by being the outcome of a procedure of purely instrumental reasoning, whereas the second holds that truths about reasons are explained by being the outcome of a procedure that involves scrutinizing ends as well as means. Once again, this *might* be a merely substantive dispute. But it needn’t be. On the contrary, it might very well be a dispute about the *nature* of reasons; about what being a reason *consists in*; about what it is for a consideration to be a reason. This is surely a meta-ethical dispute. To be sure, perhaps the parties to the dispute hold meta-ethical positions that are ultimately *implausible*. Perhaps, whereas proceduralism is a plausible view about the nature of being “out” in cricket, it is ultimately an implausible view about the nature of reasons. But there is nothing *incoherent* about the position.

responses of agents in certain idealized (but naturalistically characterized) circumstances” (Street 2010, p. 365). The proponent of the proceduralist characterization has a straightforward rejoinder to this objection as stated. This is that the proceduralist characterization is supposed to be a characterization of constructivism in general, not of *meta-ethical* constructivism in particular. It purports to explain what is common to and distinctive of versions of constructivism as such. As such, it is consistent with the claim that further conditions must be added to a characterization of meta-ethical constructivism – including perhaps the condition that the idealizations imposed not be reducible to natural facts.⁶ This would suffice to distinguish meta-ethical constructivism from naturalistic versions of the ideal observer theory.⁷

Still, Street is surely right that, whether or not the idealizations imposed on the relevant procedures are reducible to natural facts, a characterization of constructivism should be able to distinguish constructivism from the ideal observer theory. The problem is that the proceduralist characterization seems to fail to do so inasmuch as the ideal observer, no less than constructivism, is clearly a version of proceduralism. Again, however, there is a relatively simple response.⁸ While both constructivism (according to the proceduralist characterization) and the ideal observer theory assign a central role to procedures, the character of the procedures is importantly different. In particular, the proponent of the proceduralist characterization holds (or should hold) that what is distinctive of constructivist theories is that they are trying to identify what explains truths about reasons in terms of the outcome of some *deliberative* procedure: a procedure that culminates in a *decision, choice* or

⁶ Indeed, Street herself adds further conditions to her own favoured “standpoint” characterization of constructivism in order to explain what is distinctive of meta-ethical versions of constructivism (see Street 2010, p. 369).

⁷ It might be objected that this move succeeds in distinguishing meta-ethical constructivism from naturalistic versions of the ideal observer theory at the cost of rendering it indistinguishable from meta-ethical non-naturalism. The objection that meta-ethical constructivism does not represent a distinctive meta-ethical position is an important one that I will discuss in section 5. But notice that it is not specifically an objection to the proceduralist characterization so much as an important objection to constructivism itself, however reasonably characterized.

⁸ Alternatively, the proponent of the proceduralist characterization might simply embrace the conclusion that the ideal observer theory counts as a version of constructivism. Clearly, there is some kind of significant *resemblance* between paradigmatic constructivist theories and versions of the ideal observer theory. I won’t discuss this move here except to say that it seems to me to involve biting a fairly significant bullet; and that if there is some alternative characterization that does not have this implication, this gives us reason to prefer the alternative characterization.

agreement. By contrast, proponents of the ideal observer theory adduce procedures of a different kind – “cognitive psychotherapy,” “imaginative acquaintance,” “preference laundering,” and so on – that are supposed to culminate in genuine or authentic *desires* or *preferences*. This suffices to distinguish constructivism from the ideal observer theory.

Street also mentions a second objection that, I believe, is more compelling. In order to understand this objection, it is important to emphasize that the proceduralist characterization holds that constructivism is the view that truths about reasons are *explained* in terms of what emerges from some relevant procedure. So, it implies that in order for a theory to count as constructivist, the notion of a procedure must be playing a genuinely *explanatory* role within the theory. Perhaps there are *some* versions of constructivism where the notion of a procedure is supposed to be playing the requisite explanatory role. But in the case of many other versions of constructivism, this seems far less plausible. In particular, Street mentions the case of Rawls. It seems very odd to suppose that it is literally being the outcome of the hypothetical procedure described by the original position that is supposed to be explaining truths about the justice of particular social institutions. Rather, “the device of the original position is ultimately best understood as a heuristic device whose function is to capture, organize, and help us to investigate” what it is that is *really explaining* truths about reasons (Street 2010, p. 366).

A proponent of the proceduralist characterization might stubbornly insist that what this shows is that Rawls is not a constructivist. Indeed, there is a line of argument – first presented, to my knowledge, by Ronald Dworkin (1975) in his influential critique of Rawls – according to which Rawls is, in fact, a closet *intuitionist*. The original position is simply a way of rendering vivid relevant irreducible, *sui generis*, procedure-independent truths about social justice. But this is not a welcome result, given Rawls’s detailed exposition of the constructivist nature of his theory and the lengths to which he goes to distinguish it from intuitionism. If the proceduralist characterization has this implication, then it is worth looking for some alternative characterization that has the resources to accommodate theories like Rawls’s that seem to be

paradigmatically constructivist even if it is not the notion of a procedure that is central.

3. The standpoint characterization

This brings us to Street's own preferred way of characterizing constructivism. According to Street, constructivism is the view that truths about reasons are explained by what is "entailed" from within a particular "evaluative standpoint" or "point of view" (Street 2010, p. 367). Call this the *standpoint characterization* of constructivism.⁹

There are two key notions here. The first is the notion of an *evaluative standpoint*. An evaluative standpoint is comprised of a set of values or evaluative judgments. Evaluative judgments, according to Street, are *sui generis* mental states. They are not beliefs (or other cognitive states) (Street 2010, p. 381, n. 13). Nor are they desires (or other conative states) (Street 2010, p. 374). Each of us has a particular evaluative standpoint. We can also talk of evaluative standpoints in the abstract. For example, an *egalitarian* evaluative standpoint is one that is constituted by certain egalitarian evaluative judgements: e.g. that everyone is entitled to equal treatment. A *utilitarian* evaluative standpoint is constituted by certain utilitarian evaluative judgements: e.g. that well-being is all that matters morally speaking.

The second key notion is the notion of what is *entailed* from within an evaluative standpoint. Street insists that this "doesn't presuppose any normative notions. To explain the sense of entailment, we needn't make any substantive normative assumptions – for example, about what agents *should* or *ought* to do or infer" (Street 2010, p. 367). Rather, to say that something is "entailed" from within a particular standpoint is to say that it is required by rules that are "constitutively involved in the attitude of *valuing*, or *normative judgment*, as such" (Street 2010, p. 373). Street gives the following example.

[S]uppose that someone says, 'I have all-things-considered reason to get to Rome immediately, and to do so it is necessary that I buy a plane ticket, and I have no reason

⁹ Street herself calls it the "practical standpoint characterization" (Street 2010, pp. 366-7). However, since Street appears to want constructivism to be potentially a theory about *theoretical* reasons, as well as practical reasons, I have excised the word "practical."

to buy a plane ticket.' ... Our diagnosis of such a case is not that the person is making a *false judgment about his reasons*, but rather that he doesn't genuinely *judge himself to have all-things-considered reason* to get to Rome (or else doesn't genuinely *judge himself to have no reason* to buy a plane ticket) at all (Street 2010, p. 374).

If this is right, then it suggests that some kind of means-ends coherence rule is partly constitutive of the attitude of valuing and, hence, that one way in which an attitude can be "entailed" from within one's evaluative standpoint is that one is required to have the attitude given the values that constitute one's evaluative standpoint plus the means-ends coherence rule. Similarly, if there are additional rules that are constitutively involved in the attitude of valuing, then the attitudes that are required of one given one's values plus the additional rules, will also count as "entailed" from within one's evaluative standpoint.

According to the standpoint characterization, then, it is this idea of what is entailed from within an evaluative standpoint that is the "philosophical heart" of constructivism. By contrast, "the notion of a procedure is ultimately merely a heuristic device" (p. 366). Thus, for example, in the case of Rawls's constructivism, "the original position is ultimately best understood as a heuristic device whose function is to capture, organize, and help us to investigate what follows from a certain evaluative standpoint on the world – in particular, the evaluative standpoint shared by those of us who accept liberal democratic values such as freedom and equality of persons" (Street 2010, p. 366). It is the central role played by this liberal democratic evaluative standpoint, not the procedure described by the original position, that explains why Rawls's theory is a version of constructivism.

Street's standpoint characterization offers a novel and ingenious way of characterizing constructivism. It strikes me as a genuine philosophical advance on the orthodox proceduralist characterization. Nonetheless, I shall now argue that it faces two serious problems. The first is that it is unduly *restrictive*; there are certain constructivist theories that it can't accommodate. The second is that it doesn't adequately explain what is *distinctive* of constructivism.

The first problem is that the standpoint characterization is unduly restrictive. It can accommodate *many* but not *all* paradigmatically constructivist theories. I shall point to three ways in which the standpoint characterization is

unduly restrictive. While it might potentially be modified to address the first two, the third is decisive, or so it seems to me.

First, the standpoint characterization understands constructivist views as holding that truths about reasons are explained in terms of what is entailed from within a particular evaluative standpoint, where this is understood to involve a special *sui generis* evaluative attitude that is distinct from both belief and desire (Street 2010, p. 374). This means that it excludes those versions of constructivism, such as David Gauthier's (1986), that adduce purely *non-evaluative* attitudes: desires and non-evaluative beliefs. It also excludes those versions of constructivism, such as Scanlon's, that understand valuing as simply the having of evaluative *beliefs*: specifically, beliefs about reasons. This is a serious limitation.¹⁰ But there is a straightforward modification that suffices to resolve it, namely to be more inclusive about the notion of a standpoint or point of view such that evaluative beliefs and (certain) non-evaluative attitudes may be included.

Second, the standpoint characterization understands constructivist views as holding that truths about reasons are explained by what is entailed from within *an* evaluative standpoint. In consequence, it excludes those contractualist or contractarian versions of constructivism that purport to explain truths about reasons, not in terms of a single (perhaps shared) standpoint, but in terms of a *plurality* of standpoints.¹¹ Again, Gauthier's (1986) theory provides a good example. According to Gauthier, truths about morality are explained in terms of principles to which it would be instrumentally rational for individuals to dispose themselves to comply. We might say that this means that truths about morality are explained in terms of principles such that, for each individual, the disposition to comply with the principles is entailed from within that individual's standpoint. But it is certainly *not* the case that truths about moral reasons are explained in terms of what is entailed from some single (shared) standpoint. Indeed, there is

¹⁰ Street's notion of *sui generis* "valuing" is also rather elusive. For an excellent critical discussion, see Ridge 2012.

¹¹ This is what Stephen Darwall (2003) takes to be the central bone of contention between Hobbesian and Kantian versions of contractualism; or, as Darwall, puts it, between contractarians and contractualists.

no single (shared) standpoint from within which anything is entailed.¹² Again, this is a serious limitation of the standpoint characterization. But, again, it seems to me that the standpoint characterization could be modified to deal with this problem. The required modification would understand constructivism as the view that truths about reasons are somehow explained in terms of what is entailed from within some *set* of standpoints. This would suffice to accommodate views, such as Gauthier's, that insist upon a plurality of standpoints.

Third and most importantly, the standpoint characterization has the implication that constructivists are committed to a very particular conception of the rules that describe what is "entailed" from within a standpoint. The rules must be something like 1) requirements of *rationality* that 2) have *narrow-scope* and 3) that are *constitutive* of the attitude of valuing. Let us take each of these in turn.

To begin with, the rules must be something like what have been called structural *requirements of rationality*,¹³ where such requirements are supposed to be distinct from both *substantive norms* (claims that are composed of claims about reasons) and *rules of deliberation* (see Broome 1999; 2013; Schroeder 2004; Kolodny 2005; Southwood 2008). They can't be or involve *substantive norms* because, as we saw, Street is quite explicit that the notion of entailment is supposed to be normatively neutral. "To explain the sense of entailment, we needn't make any substantive normative assumptions – for example, about what agents *should* or *ought* to do or infer" (Street 2010, p. 367). They can't be *rules of deliberation* because such rules don't require *anything* of us just insofar as we *have* certain attitudes. Rather, they only require things of us insofar as we are engaged in the activity of deliberating. To be sure, plausibly we deliberate *with* (the contents of) the attitudes that we have. But such deliberation requires somehow *activating* these attitudes. The mere fact that we have certain attitudes

¹² Someone might respond by saying that there is a *kind* of shared standpoint: the standpoint constituted by the shared desire to cooperate conditional on others also cooperating. But that would be a mistake. Gauthier holds that one's standpoint is constituted by one's own "non-tuistic" desires; and one has the desire to cooperate, conditional on others also cooperating, only insofar as and because cooperation is taken to help realize *these* desires. In any case, the "shared standpoint" that is constituted by the shared desire to cooperate conditional on others also cooperating is plainly insufficient to explain truths about moral reasons. For this we need the plurality of individual standpoints.

¹³ Requirements of rationality, in this sense, are "requirements of something like internal coherence among our mental states" (Southwood 2008, p. 9).

plus the fact that we are subject to certain rules of deliberation doesn't entail anything. Notice that this means that the standpoint characterization excludes those versions of constructivism that recognize a central role for *deliberation* in accordance with certain requirements, such as Jurgen Habermas's "discourse ethics" (Habermas 1984, 1987) and the related "deliberative contractualism" that I have myself defended elsewhere (Southwood 2010, ch. 4). Such theories simply cannot be represented as genuinely constructivist according to the standpoint characterization.

Next, the rules must be *narrow-scope* in form.¹⁴ Take the means-ends coherence rule that Street endorses. This holds that one is required to judge that one has reason to Y if one judges that one has sufficient reason to X and judges that one can only X if one Ys. John Broome (1999) has noted that such rules can be interpreted in two ways. According to the narrow-scope interpretation, the requirement applies to the consequent of the conditional. So the correct interpretation holds that if one judges that one has sufficient reason to X and judges that one can only X if one Ys, then one is required to judge that one has reason to Y. By contrast, according to the wide-scope interpretation, the requirement ranges over the whole conditional. So the correct interpretation of the rule holds that one is required to see to it that (if one judges that one has sufficient reason to X and believes that one can only X if one Ys, then one judges that one has reason to Y). Notice that wide-scope rules *never* require us to *have particular attitudes*. Rather, they simply require us to have certain *combinations* of attitudes. The attitudes that comprise a particular standpoint plus wide-scope rules never entail anything. Thus, once again, the proceduralist characterization necessarily excludes versions of constructivism that are based on wide-scope rules.

Finally, the rules must be understood as "constitutively involved in the attitude of *valuing*, or *normative judgment*, as such" (Street 2010, p. 373). Notice that this ties constructivism inexorably to constitutivism: roughly, the thesis that the rules of (practical) reason partly constitute the evaluative standpoint (see Katsafanas this volume). Many constructivists, such as Kant, Korsgaard, and

¹⁴ Some philosophers will be worried by the *combination* of first these two commitments. John Broome (1999; 2013), for example, has influentially argued that requirements of rationality, such as the means-ends coherence rule, are wide-scope in form. I shall set aside this worry.

indeed Street herself) are indeed constitutivists of this kind. And constitutivism is doing important philosophical work for these constructivists, as we shall see below. But it is highly questionable that constructivists must be constitutivists *as a matter of definition*. For example, Scanlon's and Rawls's constructivist theories don't seem to involve, or indeed to be consistent with, constitutivism. If that's right, the standpoint characterization implies that Scanlon and Rawls are not really constructivists – clearly an unacceptable result.

The first problem with the standpoint characterization, then, is that it's too restrictive; it can't accommodate certain constructivist theories. There is also a second problem with the standpoint characterization. This is that it fails to give a plausible account of what is *distinctive* about constructivism. One way to bring this out is to note that broadly Humean theories of reasons (e.g. Schroeder 2007) seem to come tantalizingly close to counting as versions of constructivism by the lights of the standpoint characterization. Humeans can also be interpreted as holding that truths about reasons are to be explained in terms of what is rationally required of us from within a certain standpoint, namely, the standpoint comprising one's desires (and perhaps one's means-ends beliefs). Street acknowledges the similarity between the views but insists that constructivist theories remain "crucially different from standard Humean views" inasmuch as "they take an understanding of the nature of the attitude of *valuing* or *normative judgment* – in contrast to that of mere *desire* – to be essential" (Street 2010, p. 370). Of course, this suggestion blocks the possibility of the modification to the standpoint characterization that I suggested above was needed in order to avoid excluding certain versions of constructivism, such as Gauthier's. More importantly, it simply doesn't seem to get to the heart of the difference between constructivist and Humean theories. What is missing from the standpoint characterization, it seems to me, is a proper recognition of the privileged place that constructivists give to *reasoning* in the explanation of truths about reasons. Whereas Humeans adduce requirements of rationality as a means of ensuring that agents get what they really (that is, ultimately) want, or that agents' desires are genuine or authentic inasmuch as they are not based on false

beliefs, constructivists point to the correct exercise of reasoning as the *source* of truths about reasons.¹⁵

Let me sum up. We can learn a lot from Street's standpoint characterization. It represents a clear improvement on the proceduralist characterization. Nonetheless, it fails to provide a sufficiently general and distinctive characterization of constructivism. For that we need a different kind of account.

4. The correct reasoning characterization

My simple suggestion is that we should understand constructivism as a view about the primacy of *correct reasoning* in explaining truths about reasons. It is natural to suppose that reasoning correctly involves being appropriately responsive to relevant reasons for and against acting in different ways that are prior to and independent of our reasoning about them. Constructivism, I suggest, is the view that the order of explanation runs in the other direction. Reasons are explained in terms of *correct reasoning*, rather than vice versa. The crucial thought is that there are certain *standards of correct reasoning*. Possible candidates for such standards are (narrow-scope and/or wide-scope) *requirements of rationality; rules of deliberation; and substantive norms* that are composed of certain reasons.¹⁶ Truths about reasons are then explained in terms of correct reasoning, that is, reasoning that satisfies standards of correctness that are prior to and independent of reasons of the kind that are being explained. Call this the *correct reasoning* characterization of constructivism.

Notice that this does not necessarily mean that the standards of correctness must be prior to and independent of reasons of *any* kind. For example, Scanlon's contractualist constructivism purports to explain truths about what we owe to each other in terms of correct reasoning that involves a special kind of action and that is regulated by a special kind of aim (roughly,

¹⁵ When desires figure prominently in constructivist views, such as Gauthier's (1986), these views are constructivist only insofar as and because of the role the desires play in a certain account of correct reasoning.

¹⁶ John Broome (2013) has recently argued that it is mistake to suppose that reasoning is made correct by requirements of rationality or substantive norms. Rather, according to Broome, reasoning is made correct by what he calls "basing permissions of rationality." Basing permissions permit us to form some attitude(s) on the basis of some (other) attitude(s) (Broome 2013, p. 190). According to Broome, "a correct rule [of reasoning] is one that corresponds to a [valid] basing permission of rationality" (Broome 2013, p. 255). For discussion, see Southwood forthcoming a.

living together with others on terms that no one could reasonably reject). According to Scanlon, the standards of correctness here are certain substantive norms that are composed of certain relevant reasons. So what it takes for reasoning of this special kind to be correct is precisely a matter of being appropriately responsive to this class of reasons. Nonetheless, Scanlon is insistent that the correctness of reasoning of this kind does *not* depend on being responsive to truths of the kind that are being explained: namely, truths about what we owe to each other. Being a constructivist about what we owe to each other, Scanlon holds that there are *no* truths about what we owe to each other that are prior to and independent of correct reasoning about how to live with one another on terms that no one could reasonably reject. Rather, truths about what we owe to each other are explained in terms of correct reasoning of this special kind.

Something very much like the correct reasoning characterization is, in fact, suggested by Street. She writes, “one way to present ... constructivism is as claiming that normative facts are constituted by facts about what is entailed by the ‘rules of ... reason’ in combination with the non-normative facts. The trick, of course, is to give a plausible account of the ‘rules of ... reason’” (Street 2010, 373). What is interesting is that the idea of an evaluative standpoint doesn’t figure here at all. To be sure, it’s lurking in the background. As we have seen, Street herself happens to endorse the view that the rules or requirements in virtue of which reasoning is correct are constitutive of the attitudes that comprise the evaluative standpoint. But this is a further commitment, which we needn’t accept simply in virtue of accepting the more general idea that truths about reasons are explained in terms of correct reasoning.

One nice thing about the correct reasoning characterization is that it is perfectly compatible with versions of constructivism that assign a central role to either procedures or standpoints. Both, in their different ways, can be understood to be purporting to identify what explains truths about reasons in terms of correct reasoning: proceduralist accounts in terms of actual or hypothetical procedures that exemplify or model correct reasoning; standpoint accounts in terms of (evaluative) standpoints from within which certain things are entailed in combination with narrow-scope requirements of rationality.

Yet the correct reasoning characterization also nicely dodges the problems of the proceduralist and standpoint characterizations. The main problem with the proceduralist characterization is that it excludes those versions of constructivism, such as Rawls's, for which the notion of a procedure seems to be a mere heuristic, rather than what is really explaining truths about reasons. According to the correct reasoning characterization, we should understand Rawls's constructivism as holding that truths about social justice are explained in terms of what is rationally required of anyone who accepts certain liberal democratic substantive norms. The function of the original position is simply to render vivid a certain kind of reasoning from liberal democratic premises.

The correct reasoning characterization also avoids the problems of the standpoint characterization. One problem with the standpoint characterization is that it excludes a number of versions of constructivism: versions that try to explain truths about reasons in terms of non-evaluative attitudes; or in terms of a plurality of standpoints; or in terms of rules of deliberation; or in terms of wide-scope requirements of rationality; or that deny that standards of correct reasoning are constitutive of the attitude of valuing as such. Even if it can be modified to deal with some of these exclusions, it cannot deal with them all. By contrast, the correct reasoning characterization is perfectly compatible with these versions of constructivism. The other problem with the standpoint characterization is that it fails to explain the distinctive role that constructivists hold that the faculty of reason plays in the determination of truths about reasons. By contrast, the faculty of reason – in particular, its correct exercise – occupies centre-stage within the correct reasoning characterization.

The correct reasoning characterization, then, seems to do a good job of accommodating the many different versions of constructivism and explaining what they have in common as well as explaining what makes such views distinctive. Can it also explain what makes constructivism a *prima facie* appealing view? It seems to me that it can. Constructivism is *prima facie* appealing inasmuch as it promises to offer a vindicating explanation of truths about reasons that largely eschews controversial metaphysical and normative assumptions. Thus, unlike views that simply take truths about reasons as brute and primitive, it promises to identify what *explains* these truths. Unlike views

that explain truths about reasons in terms of normatively questionable phenomena such as contingent social practices or desires, it promises to provide a *vindicating* explanation, since it identifies what explains truths about reason in terms of correct reasoning. Unlike views that postulate metaphysically suspect entities, such as God or intrinsic value or a domain of irreducible non-natural facts, it promises to make do with a relatively metaphysically modest tool-kit.¹⁷ And, unlike views that try to explain truths about reasons in terms of very specific reasons or values, it promises to explain truths about reasons in a way that is compatible with rather different normative starting points.¹⁸

So it seems that we have arrived at a more satisfactory characterization of constructivism. Constructivism is the view that truths about reasons are somehow explained in terms of correct reasoning. This characterization, like its rivals, the proceduralist and standpoint characterizations, is, of course, a *schema* that can be (and has been) filled in many different ways. We noted in section 2 that there are different *kinds* of constructivism. There are also, as I shall put it, different *versions* of constructivism. Versions of constructivism differ, in particular, in terms of certain features of the *standards of correctness* that are adduced to explain truths about reasons – in particular, in terms of the *category, nature and content* of those standards.

First, they differ in terms of the *category* of standards of correctness. Are they requirements of rationality, rules of deliberation, or substantive norms? Call the ensuing versions of constructivism *rationalist, deliberative* and *substantive* versions of constructivism, respectively. Street (2008) is clearly a rationalist constructivism. So too is Gauthier (1986). Many other constructivists (most obviously Habermas (1984-1987) but perhaps also Korsgaard (1996a)) are arguably best thought of as deliberative constructivists since they hold that

¹⁷ How about those versions of constructivism such as Scanlon's that are combined with a non-naturalist account of reasons? It is certainly not true that this *combination* of views avoids postulating metaphysically suspect entities. But, as Scanlon repeatedly emphasises, his constructivist account of morality (or what we owe to each other) does not depend on accepting non-naturalism (or indeed any particular view) about the nature of reasons. The point is that there is nothing metaphysically suspect about Scanlon's constructivism in particular. I am grateful to Daniel Star for forcing me to clarify this point.

¹⁸ This is true even of those versions of constructivism such as Rawls's that purport to explain truths about social justice in terms of what is rationally required of anyone who accepts certain liberal democratic substantive norms. The point is that a commitment to liberal democracy is compatible with a wide range of other normative convictions.

truths about reasons are to be explained in terms of rules of deliberation. Scanlon (1998), as we have seen, is a substantive constructivist since he holds that truths about what we owe to each other are explained in terms of what principles could be reasonably rejected, where the reasonable rejectability of a principle is a matter of the comparative weight of certain relevant reasons: roughly, reasons that are compatible with respecting the status of oneself and others as autonomous agents.

Second, versions of constructivism differ in terms of which *particular standards of correctness* (within the relevant category) are supposed to explain truths about reasons. One important contrast is between those versions of constructivism that hold that the single valid standard of correctness is some kind of means-ends rule or requirement and those that also adduce requirements that make demands on our ends. Since these two versions of constructivism are most famously associated with Hobbes and Kant, respectively, we might call them “Hobbesian” and “Kantian” constructivism, respectively. That is fine, so long as we recognize that there are a number of different ways in which one might be a “Kantian” in this sense.¹⁹ One is to insist that the categorical imperative is a valid requirement of rationality or rule of deliberation, as Kant and his descendants do (see Kant 1998; Korsgaard 1996a; O’Neill 1989). Another is to be a substantive constructivist (see Scanlon 1998). Yet another is to adduce other not-purely-instrumental requirements, such as requirements of deliberative reciprocity (see Southwood 2010, ch. 4).

Third, versions of constructivism also differ in terms of the *nature* of the relevant standards of correctness. Some constructivists, such as Gauthier (1986), appear to be *naturalist constructivists* since they are naturalists about the relevant standards of correctness. Scanlon (1998, ch. 1) is a *non-naturalist constructivist* since he endorses a non-naturalistic view of the substantive norms that he takes to explain truths about what we owe to each other. Street (2010) and Korsgaard (1996a) are *constitutivist constructivists* since they hold that the relevant standards of correctness are constitutive of the attitude of valuing. Aaron James (2012) is a kind of *pragmatist constructivist*, who holds that the

¹⁹ Moreover, it is not the only way in which these labels get used. For a quite different way of using the “Kantian” and “Hobbesian” (or “Humean”) labels, see Street (2010, pp. 369-70).

relevant standards of correctness are inherent in the social practices of the liberal democratic state. Many other constructivists (e.g. Rawls 1980) are silent on the issue.

The point is, then, that just as there are many different *kinds* of constructivism, so too are there many different *versions*. Having arrived at a more satisfactory understanding of constructivism, let us say something about how this might help us in the evaluation of constructivism.

5. Evaluating constructivism

I have offered a way of understanding constructivism – in general and in its many different forms. In conclusion, I want to say something about the implications of understanding constructivism in this way for the project of *evaluating* constructivism. I shall suggest that doing so shows that certain challenges that have been raised against constructivist theories miss the mark. It also makes certain other challenges especially pressing and vivid. I will structure my remarks by considering the three salient kinds of constructivism that we encountered in section 2.

5.1. Local normative constructivism

Let's start with local normative constructivism. According to the correct reasoning characterization, this holds that certain standards of correct reasoning *normatively explain* or *ground* certain truths about reasons (say, truths about morality or social justice). Since it is a kind of *normative* constructivism, the explanation that it purports to identify of truths about the relevant reasons must appeal to *other truths about reasons*. Since it is a *local* kind of normative constructivism, the explanation must appeal to truths about the *same kinds of reasons* as those that it purports to explain. So, for example, local normative constructivism about morality holds that the explanation of moral requirements lies with some more general moral requirement involving standards of correct reasoning. That is, we are morally required to perform the acts that we are morally required to perform *because* we are morally required to, say, comply with relevant substantive norms, or comply with principles to which we would agree if we fully complied with relevant requirements of rationality, or whatever.

Notice that this way of understanding local normative constructivism allows us to see immediately that certain objections that are commonly raised against it are thoroughly misguided. For example, a common objection to Rawls's theory is that it is implausible because, while we have reason to respect *actual* agreements, it's not true that we have reason to respect merely *hypothetical* agreements. As Ronald Dworkin famously put it, Rawls's "contract is hypothetical, and hypothetical contracts do not supply an independent argument for the fairness of enforcing their terms. A hypothetical contract is not simply a pale form of an actual contract; it is no contract at all" (Dworkin 1975, pp. 17-18; Hampton 1986, p. 268; Kavka 1986, p. 399). Perhaps this is a good objection to local normative constructivism according to the proceduralist characterization (though see Southwood 2010, pp. 134-5). But it's not a good objection to local normative constructivism according to the correct reasoning characterization. Thus characterized, local normative constructivism about social justice explains truths about social justice in terms of a more general requirement of justice involving standards of correct reasoning. In the case of Rawls's theory, this is something like a general requirement to reason in a certain way on the basis of certain liberal democratic premises. The general requirement to which Rawls appeals isn't a requirement to respect some hypothetical contract or agreement, but a requirement to treat others in certain ways.

Another common objection to constructivist theories such as Rawls's is that they appeal to truths about social justice or morality in order to explain truths about social justice or morality. For example, Robert Goodin (1993, p. 117) accuses a whole range of philosophers of "smuggling moral assumptions into the premises of [their] argument[s] for morality. ... Certainly John Rawls's theory of justice, for example, is guilty of the same sin." But this is a rather odd objection to local normative constructivism.²⁰ Local normative constructivism *just is* the view that truths about reasons of the kind that are being explained are also doing the explaining. If it didn't appeal to such truths, then it wouldn't be a version of local normative constructivism.

²⁰ In fairness to Goodin, his principal target in the article is David Gauthier, who is not a local normative constructivist.

These are just two examples of how getting clear about what constructivism is can help us avoid being seduced by irrelevant objections. As flagged above, a proper understanding of constructivism can also direct our attention towards the real challenges facing constructivism. In the case of local normative constructivism, it should be clear that the central challenge is to come up with a theory that is both substantively plausible and explanatory. That is, it must identify some reason of the relevant kind involving standards of correct reasoning such that 1) we really have that reason and 2) the reason is really explaining why we have the other reasons (of that kind) that we do. For example, a local normative constructivist account of morality must identify some moral requirement involving standards of correct reasoning such that 1*) we are really subject to the moral requirement and 2*) the moral requirement is really explaining why we are subject to the other moral requirements to which we are subject.

It is relatively easy to come up with an account that is substantively plausible but unexplanatory, or that would be explanatory but is substantively implausible. But it is anything but easy to come up with a theory that is both substantively plausible and genuinely explanatory. As an example of a theory that seems substantively plausible but unexplanatory, consider a local normative constructivist interpretation of Scanlon's contractualism.²¹ This would hold, roughly, that we are morally required to perform the acts that we are morally required to perform *because* we are morally required to comply with principles to which no one could reasonably object. It is pretty plausible, it seems to me, that we are subject to such a moral requirement. But it is far less plausible that this *explains why* we are morally required to, say, refrain from breaking into one's neighbor's house and murdering him in his bed. As an example of a theory that would be explanatory but is substantively implausible, consider a local normative constructivist interpretation of Gauthier's contractarianism.²² This would hold, roughly, that we are morally required to perform the acts that we are morally required to perform *because* we are morally required to comply with principles to which it would be instrumentally rational for a majority of us to

²¹ It must be emphasized that Scanlon himself forcibly repudiates this interpretation of his contractualism (see Scanlon 1998, p. 391, n. 21).

²² Again, this is almost certainly an implausible interpretation of what Gauthier actually says.

agree. If it were true that we are subject to such a moral requirement, it would be potentially highly explanatory. But it seems plainly false. The principles to which it would be instrumentally rational for a majority of us to agree will be a function of contingent facts about our desires. If these desires are nasty enough, then it will be, not only not morally required, but morally impermissible for us to comply with such principles. Herein lies the real challenge to local normative constructivism.

5.2. Local constitutive constructivism

Next, consider local constitutive constructivism. According to the correct reasoning characterization, this holds that certain standards of correct reasoning constitutively explain certain truths about reasons (say, about morality or justice). Since it is a kind of *constitutive* constructivism, the explanation of the relevant truths about reasons cannot itself appeal to truths of the kind that are being explained. So, for example, the explanation of, say, truths about morality cannot itself appeal to moral truths. Otherwise, it would fail to be an account of the *nature* of moral truths, of what moral truths *consist in*. However, since it is a kind of *local* rather than global constructivism, it *can* appeal to *other* kinds of reasons. Thus, there is no impediment to adducing *substantive* norms in the explanation of reasons of the relevant kind.

Again, notice that this way of understanding local constitutive constructivism immediately makes clear what is wrong with certain common objections to it. For example, there is the so-called “redundancy” or “epiphenomenal objection” to Scanlon’s contractualism, which holds that the putative explanans (i.e. the contractual apparatus) is really an explanatorily inert by-product of what is really explaining truths about morality, namely, truths about relevant reasons. As Philip Pettit (1993, p. 302) puts it, “It is hard to see why we do not take the right-making property ... to be the non-hypothetical property which recommends itself to the contractors. It is hard to see why we should ignore that property and focus instead on the hypothetical property.” Similarly, Simon Blackburn (1999) writes, “Suppose that it is reasonable to reject my principles because, for instance, they lead to vast inequalities of wealth. Why then isn't this the very feature that makes my principles wrong? Why go through

the detour of dragging in the hypothetical agreement with others?” This objection seems to be presupposing the proceduralist characterization – that Scanlon is trying to explain truths about morality in terms of the outcome of some kind of hypothetical procedure.²³ But, as the correct reasoning characterization nicely brings out, this is not the core of his constructivist account of morality. Rather, what is central are certain substantive norms in virtue of which a certain kind of reasoning is correct and which are, in effect, simply candidate truths about the comparative weight of relevant reasons.

Another related objection to Scanlon’s theory is that it offers a substantively implausible account of what explains truths about morality. For example, Colin McGinn (1999, p. 36) writes:

Why is it wrong to cause unnecessary pain to infants and animals? Is it because they could reasonably object to such treatment? Hardly. ... Surely, the reason it is wrong to cause non-rational beings pain is that pain is a bad thing, and hence it is wrong to cause it for no good reason.

This objection also completely misses the mark. Constitutive constructivists aren’t trying to answer the question, “Why is it wrong to cause unnecessary pain to infants and animals?” That’s what normative constructivists are up to. Rather, they are in the business of answering a quite different question, namely, “What do truths about morality *consist in*?”

The real challenge for local constitutive constructivism, I believe, is to come up with an account of the standards of correct reasoning that can do two things (see Southwood 2010, pp. 12-22). First, it must be sufficiently *faithful* to certain core properties possessed by truths about reasons of the kind that are being explained. For example, truths about morality are plausibly thought to possess a special impartiality, authority, universality, and other-regardingness. If this is right, an account of what constitutively explains truths about morality must, therefore, be sufficiently faithful to these properties. Second, it must be genuinely *explanatory* with respect to truths about reasons of the relevant kind (see Southwood 2010, ch. 7). Thus, it must get the order of explanation right;

²³ Like McGinn’s objection discussed below, it also seems to be presupposing that Scanlon’s view is a kind of normative constructivism (see Stratton-Lake 2003a; 2003b).

truths about the relevant reasons must be constitutively explained by truths about standards of correct reasoning, rather than vice versa. It must be non-circular; it must not presuppose what it purports to explain. And so on.

I have myself argued elsewhere that the main existing “Hobbesian” and “Kantian” versions of local constitutive constructivism about morality are poorly equipped to satisfy both criteria; and that we need a radically different, “deliberative” kind of constructivist theory (Southwood 2010). The problem with Hobbesian views is that the thin instrumentalist specification of the standards of correct reasoning means that they are not sufficiently faithful to morality’s impartiality, authority and other-regardiness (Southwood 2010, ch. 2). The problem with at least the most popular Kantian views is that the thick and substantive specification of the standards of correct reasoning means that they aren’t genuinely explanatory with respect to truths about morality. Rather, they presuppose moral considerations in at least two places: in the determination of relevant reasons; and in the determination of the comparative weight of relevant reasons (Southwood 2010, ch. 3). The problem, in each case, is that without importing substantive moral assumptions the notion of reasonableness simply lacks sufficiently determinate content to generate plausible first-order moral truths. By contrast, deliberative contractualism, which is based on a conception of practical reason that is procedural yet normatively rich, is better placed to capture morality’s impartiality, authority and other-regardiness while also being genuinely explanatory. Or so I have argued (see Southwood 2010, esp. chs. 6 and 7). In any case, this is where the real challenge lies when it comes to local constitutive constructivism.

5.3. Global constitutive constructivism

Finally, let us consider global constitutive constructivism. This holds that certain standards of correct reasoning constitutively explain *all* truths about reasons (or at least all truths about practical reasons). Unlike the other versions of constructivism that we have encountered, global constitutive constructivism cannot appeal to *any* truths about reasons in the explanation of truths about reasons. Otherwise, it would be viciously circular. What this means, then, is that global constitutive constructivists cannot adduce substantive norms since these

are composed of reasons. Rather, they must adduce either requirements of rationality or rules of deliberation; and these must not themselves involve truths about reasons. In these respects, global constitutive constructivism is an exceptionally *ambitious* form of constructivism. Unsurprisingly, it faces many forceful challenges (see e.g. Enoch 2011; Hussain and Shah 2006; Wallace 2012). I want to focus here on two formidable challenges that are nicely brought to the fore by the correct reasoning characterization.

The first results from a familiar kind of *substantive mismatch* between requirements of rationality and rules of deliberation, on the one hand, and the reasons we have, on the other. Plausibly I can be *rationally required* to (intend to) put arsenic in your coffee if I intend to kill you and believe that I can only kill you by putting arsenic in your coffee.²⁴ But it certainly doesn't seem to follow that I have *reason* to put arsenic in your coffee. Similarly, if I deliberate on the basis of my intention to kill you and my belief that I can only kill you by putting arsenic in your coffee to the intention to put arsenic in your coffee, then it seems that I have followed a valid rule of deliberation. But, again, this doesn't mean that I have any *reason* to put arsenic in your coffee. The idea that we can make it the case that we have reasons simply by having or forming certain objectionable attitudes that activate requirements of rationality, or by deliberating correctly on the basis of these attitudes, seems to be to countenance objectionable "bootstrapping" (see Broome 1999; Kolodny 2005). There is a serious worry, then, that global constitutive constructivists, inasmuch as they try to identify what explains truths about reasons in terms of requirements of rationality or rules of deliberation, will be especially susceptible to such bootstrapping.

There are two main kinds of responses to this worry. The Kantian response is to insist that the standards of correct reasoning in terms of which truths about reasons are constitutively explained include the categorical imperative (see Korsgaard 1996, esp. lectures 3 and 4). The categorical imperative is not simply a substantive moral requirement but a genuine requirement of rationality or valid rule of deliberation. You only count as rational, or engaged in correct deliberation (if you are deliberating at all), insofar as you comply with it. The

²⁴ This is supposed to be neutral concerning whether the requirement in question is a narrow-scope or wide-scope requirement.

Hobbesian response is to bite the bullet and concede that we can “bootstrap” ourselves into having reasons on the basis of (what seem to be) objectionable attitudes (see Street 2009; 2012).

Neither of these responses is especially compelling. It is highly implausible to suppose that requirements of rationality or rules of deliberation include the categorical imperative. Or at least, this is highly implausible *unless* we assume that such requirements or rules themselves somehow involve reasons, in which case global constitutive constructivism will be viciously circular. But to countenance bootstrapping is hopeless as well. It seems to me that the global constitutive constructivist needs a better response.

While there isn’t space to develop such a response here, my own view is that the most promising line of response will involve three things. First, it will avoid extravagantly ambitious requirements of rationality or rules of deliberation and stick to a relatively modest set of such requirements or rules (though not necessarily quite so modest as Hobbesians insist upon). Second, it will involve a version of constructivism that purports, at least in the first instance, to explain our “subjective reasons” (or, as I prefer to put it, “standpoint-relative reasons”). Standpoint-relative reasons are reasons of a kind where the charge of objectionable bootstrapping does not arise. Third, it will involve insisting that so-called “objective reasons” (or “standpoint-invariant reasons”), where the charge of bootstrapping certainly does arise, are explained in terms of subjective (standpoint-relative) reasons, rather than vice versa, but in a way that “launders” out the features that generate bootstrapping.²⁵

The second really serious challenge for global constitutive constructivism that is brought to the fore by the correct reasoning characterization concerns the *nature* (in particular the *normative status*) of the standards of correct reasoning. Notice that, according to the standpoint characterization of constructivism, we get an answer to the question, “What is the nature of the relevant standards of correct reasoning?” for free. They are those standards that are constitutive of the attitude of valuing that comprises the evaluative standpoint. But the correct reasoning characterization doesn’t come with any such answer. Rather, the question is a live one.

²⁵ I make a start in developing such an account in Southwood forthcoming b.

The problem is that the natural ways of answering the question make constructivism collapse into one or other of the standard meta-ethical views (see Enoch 2011; Ridge 2012). For example, one might think that the standards of correct reasoning are reducible to natural facts – say, certain conventions or social practices. In that case, constructivism turns out to be ultimately a version of meta-ethical naturalism. Alternatively, one might think that the standards of correct reasoning are irreducible, *sui generis* normative requirements. In that case, constructivism turns out to be ultimately a version of meta-ethical non-naturalism. Or, again, one might think that our talk and thought involving standards of correct reasoning can ultimately be explained in terms of the expression of conative attitudes. In that case, constructivism turns out to be ultimately a version of meta-ethical expressivism. Perhaps this is all just fine. Perhaps we shouldn't ever have expected constructivism to be anything other than a particular version of one of the existing meta-ethical options (see Lenman 2012; Ridge 2012). At least some constructivists, however, have clearly hoped for more (see Korsgaard 1996a; Street 2008).

Once again, then, global constitutive constructivists here confront a truly formidable challenge. One possible solution to this challenge is to resort again to *constitutivism* about the standards of correct reasoning. Constitutivism is a vibrant and exciting research program (see Katsafanas this volume). But I am not myself optimistic that it is up to the task. The problem, to my mind, is that it is doubtful that there *are any* standpoint-constituting demands, or at least that standards of correct reasoning are instances of them (see Enoch 2006; Southwood forthcoming b). A standpoint-constituting requirement would be a requirement such that you don't count as even having attitudes of the right kind unless you accept (Korsgaard 1996) or comply with (Street 2010) the requirement. But it seems that we can easily imagine individuals who don't accept or comply with valid requirements of reason without this implying that they lack the attitudes of the right kind.

My own view is that we should look elsewhere. At least in the case of practical reason, I believe that the best response will involve showing that standards of correct reasoning have a kind of special normative status that is somehow crucially tied to the faculty of reason, rather than prior to and

independent of it, in such a way that they don't raise the kinds of meta-ethical puzzles to which constructivism was supposed to be a solution. I have suggested elsewhere that there is a kind of normative status, which is comprised of what I have called truths about "the thing to do" (see Southwood 2016). Truths about the thing to do just are truths about the answer to the question that practical reason tries to answer, the question of what to do. If this is right – a very big "if" – then it may potentially help the constructivist in providing an account of the nature of the standards of correct reasoning that can allow her to forge a distinctive and plausible meta-ethical position. The idea would be that standards of correct reasoning are or involve truths about the thing to do. So the normative status of standards of correct reasoning is crucially tied to reason but not, as the constitutivist would have it, because they help to constitute the evaluative standpoint. Rather, the normative status of standards of correct reasoning derives from their telling us the answer to the question that practical reason tries to answer, the question of what to do (see Southwood forthcoming b).

It is time to conclude. I have done nothing more here than gesture at what I take to be some of the main challenges confronting constructivism and some possible ways of developing responses to them. My main point has been to show how the real challenges emerge and are brought into stark relief once we have a more satisfactory understanding of constructivism. Whether the challenges can be adequately addressed is a large topic for another occasion.

References

- Bagnoli, Carla. 2011. Constructivism in metaethics. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Blackburn, Simon. 1999. Am I right? *New York Times*, 21 February.
- Broome, John. 1999. Normative requirements. *Ratio*, 12, 398-412.
- Broome, John. 2013. *Rationality Through Reasoning*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Darwall, Stephen. 2003. Introduction. Pp. 1–8 in Stephen Darwall (ed.), *Contractarianism/Contractualism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Darwall, Stephen, Alan Gibbard, and Peter Railton. 1992. Toward *fin de siecle* ethics: some trends. *The Philosophical Review*, 101, 115–189.

- Dworkin, Ronald. 1975. The original position. Pp. 16–53 in Norman Daniels (ed.), *Reading Rawls: Critical Studies of A Theory of Justice*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Enoch, David. 2006. Agency, shmagency: why normativity won't come from what is constitutive of agency. *Philosophical Review*, 115, 169–198.
- Enoch, David. 2009. Can there be a global, interesting, coherent constructivism about practical reason? *Philosophical Explorations*, 12, 319–339.
- Gauthier, David. 1986. *Morals By Agreement*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Goodin, Robert. 1993. Equal rationality and initial endowments. Pp. 116–30 in David Gauthier and Robert Sugden (eds), *Rationality, Justice and the Social Contract: Themes From Morals By Agreement*. New York; London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1984–1987. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Hampton, Jean. 1986. *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition*. New York; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Harman, Gilbert. 1975. Moral relativism defended. *Philosophical Review*, 84, 3–22.
- Hobbes, Thomas. 1994. *Leviathan*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.
- Hussain, Nadeem and Nishi Shah. 2006. Misunderstanding metaethics. *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, 1, 265–94.
- James, Aaron. 2012. *Fairness in Practice: A Social Contract for a Global Economy*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Joyce, Richard. 2002. Theistic ethics and the Euthyphro dilemma. *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 30, 49–75.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1998. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Katsafanas, Paul. This Volume. Constitutivism about practical reasons. In Daniel Star (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Reasons and Normativity*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kavka, Gregory. 1986. *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kolodny, Niko. 2005. Why be rational? *Mind*, 114, 509–63.
- Korsgaard, Christine. 1996a. *The Sources of Normativity*. New York: Cambridge

- University Press.
- Korsgaard, Christine. 1996b. *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Korsgaard, Christine. 2008. *The Constitution of Agency*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Korsgaard, Christine. 2009. The activity of reason. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association*, 83, 23-43.
- Lenman, James. 2012. Expressivism and constructivism. Pp. 213-25 in James Lenman and Yonatan Shemmer (eds), *Constructivism in Practical Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lenman, James and Yonatan Shemmer. 2012. Introduction. Pp. 1-17 in James Lenman and Yonatan Shemmer (eds), *Constructivism in Practical Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Locke, John. 1998. *Two Treatises of Government*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- McGinn, Colin. 1999. Reasons and unreasons. *The New Republic*, 24 May, 34–8.
- O'Neill Onora. 1989. *Constructions of Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pettit, Philip. 1993. *The Common Mind: An Essay in Psychology, Society, and Politics*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Plato. 1993. *Republic*, trans. Robin Waterfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rawls, John. 1971. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- Rawls, John. 1980. Kantian constructivism in moral theory. *Journal of Philosophy*, 77, 515–72.
- Rawls, John. 1993. *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Raz, Joseph. 1999. *Engaging Reason: On the Theory of Value and Action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ridge, Michael. 2012. Kantian constructivism: something old, something new. Pp. 138-58 in James Lenman and Yonatan Shemmer (eds), *Constructivism in Practical Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Scanlon, T. M. 1982. Contractualism and utilitarianism. Pp. 103–28 in Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams (eds), *Utilitarianism and Beyond*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Scanlon, T. M. 1998. *What We Owe To Each Other*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Schroeder, Mark. 2004. The scope of instrumental reason. *Philosophical Perspectives*, 18, 337-64.
- Schroeder, Mark. 2007. *Slaves of the Passions*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, Michael. 1994. *The Moral Problem*. Oxford; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Southwood, Nicholas. 2008. Vindicating the normativity of rationality. *Ethics*, 119, 9–30.
- Southwood, Nicholas. 2010. *Contractualism and the Foundations of Morality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Southwood, Nicholas. 2016. “The thing to do” implies “can.” *Nous*, 50, 61-72.
- Southwood, Nicholas. Forthcoming a. The motivation question. *Philosophical Studies*.
- Southwood, Nicholas. Forthcoming b. Constructivism without constitutivism. *The Many Moral Rationalisms*, ed. K. Jones and F. Schroeter. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stratton-Lake, Philip. 2003a. Scanlon's contractualism and the redundancy objection. *Analysis*, 63, 70–6.
- Stratton-Lake, Philip. 2003b. Scanlon, permissions, and redundancy: response to McNaughton and Rawling. *Analysis*, 63, 332–7.
- Street, Sharon. 2008. Constructivism about reasons. *Oxford Studies in Meta-Ethics*, 3, 207-45.
- Street, Sharon. 2009. In defense of future Tuesday indifference: ideally coherent eccentrics and the contingency of what matters. *Philosophical Issues*, 19, 273-98.
- Street, Sharon. 2010. What is constructivism in ethics and metaethics? *Philosophy Compass*, 5, 363–384.
- Street, Sharon. 2012. Coming to terms with contingency: Humean constructivism about practical reason. Pp. 40-59 in James Lenman and Yonatan Shemmer (eds), *Constructivism in Practical Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Street, Sharon. 2009. Evolution and the normativity of epistemic reasons.

Canadian Journal of Philosophy, 39, 213-48.

Wallace, R. Jay. 2012. Constructivism about normativity: some pitfalls. Pp. 18-39

in James Lenman and Yonatan Shemmer (eds), *Constructivism in Practical Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.