Motivation and Practical Reasons

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1. INTRODUCTION

In discussions of practical reason we often encounter the view that reasons for acting are necessarily capable of prompting or motivating action. According to this view, a fact *F* is a reason for an agent *A* to do *D* only if *F* is capable of moving *A* to do *D*. This view figures centrally in many philosophical controversies, and while taken for granted by some, it is vigorously disputed by others.[1] In this essay I show that if the disputed position is correctly interpreted, it is well armored against stock objections and implied by a premise that is not only plausible, but generally accepted by the position's critics.

The view I discuss is sometimes called "internalism," but I follow Nathanson (1985, 97) in calling it the "reasons-as-motivators view" (RM). There are good reasons for this. The label "internalism" is attached to many different positions, most of which are not my direct concern. Among them is the view that (a) a fact is a reason for *A* to do *D* only if it could move *A*, *through A's desires or other subjective psychological states*, to do *D*.[2] Many of those who dispute this view agree that (b) reasons are tied to motivation, but deny that (c) motivation always has its source in desires or other subjective states. The concern of this essay is thesis (b) – RM, as I call it – shorn of any suggestions about the exact source of motivation.[3] I show that if we read RM in

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[1]Regarding the controversies in which it figures, see section 7 and notes 3 and 4. For critics of the view see section 2. Its proponents include Harman 1975; Harman 1984; Falk 1986, chap. 4; Darwall 1983; Gauthier 1987; Korsgaard 1986; and Gaus 1990, 264–68. Some of these authors are more famous for other views – e.g., thesis (a), below – than for the view that reasons are necessarily capable of motivating. I mention this lest the latter view be confused with the former.

[2]See Williams 1981, chap. 8. For useful discussions of varieties of internalism, see Brink 1989, chap. 3; and Cohon 1993.

[3]Although RM is the point at issue in many philosophical debates, this is not always clear on the surface. For example, Postow (1979) and Nathanson (1985) each challenge RM, which they attribute to Harman (1975). Harman is well known for thesis (a); so it's easy to think that Postow and Nathanson have their sights on *that* thesis, and use RM merely as a rough formulation of it. But a close look reveals otherwise. Nathanson dubs (a) "the means/end theory," and focuses his attack on the "reasons-as-motivators view," which he sees as an *implication* of the means/end theory (given that desires are "motivational

a way that meets ordinary standards of charity we end up with a view that is plausible, resistant to standard criticisms, and tacitly accepted even by many who deny that reasons are necessarily capable of motivating.

In section 2 I present objections to RM; in sections 3 and 4 I make some clarifying remarks. One of those remarks is that we can read RM in two ways. Neither reading is unnatural, but only one results in a thesis that is plausible and fair to the intentions of RM's proponents.[4] As shown in section 5, that thesis stands up to the objections in section 2, and follows from an intuitively compelling premise that most critics of RM accept. In section 6 I address objections to the claims in section 5, and in section 7 I briefly discuss the bearing of those claims on other controversies, including the controversy over agent-relativism in ethics.

2. OBJECTIONS TO RM

The first objection to RM comes from Kurt Baier and Stephen Nathanson,[5] who think that RM rules out the parity we should expect between practical and theoretical reasons. In our thinking about theoretical reasons, meaning reasons to believe this or that, we give little attention to their effects on people's thoughts. If *p* clearly implies *q*, and Frank knows *p*, we conclude that Frank has a reason to believe *q*. We do not pause to ask if *p* would *move* Frank to believe *q*. And if we later find that it would not, we do not give up our belief that Frank has a reason to believe *q*. Instead, we find fault with Frank's reasoning. So to put practical reasons on par with theoretical ones we should grant that some facts are practical reasons even if they are motivationally inert.

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states"). Postow wants ultimately to refute (a), which she sees as following from (c) if we assume "that there is no reason for action without a source of motivation," meaning "that the reason for an action must be capable of motivating the agent who has the reason." So Postow focuses her attack on the latter assumption rather than on (a). In short, the direct target of Postow's and Nathanson's criticisms is RM, not (a). (A related comment: Sometimes, RM seems to be the point at issue when in fact it isn't. For instance, a quick reading of Habermas [1993, 14f, 20, 33f, 41f] might suggest that he rejects RM. But a second look reveals that he merely rejects versions or interpretations of RM that forge too close a connection between reasons and action. I believe that Habermas would accept the thesis I later introduce as RM_P.)

[4]The thesis in question, dubbed "RM_P" in section 4, will be familiar to those acquainted with Korsgaard 1986. Korsgaard's project differs from the one outlined above. Her main point is that if RM is read as RM_P, the Kantian view that some practical principles furnish everyone with reasons to act can be challenged plausibly only by examining the content of the principles, not simply by showing that some people are uninfluenced by the principles or that every intentional action has a desire among its antecedents. Clearly, her project differs from the one in this paper, which is mainly one of defending RM and showing that its critics are tacitly committed to it, not one of employing RM in the service of ethical rationalism. This is not to say that I owe nothing to Korsgaard's essay. I have profited greatly from it; also from Darwall 1983, and Falk 1986.

[5]Baier 1989, 100ff; Nathanson 1985, 97ff. See also Baier 1978c, 712; and Baier 1965, 40f, 45.

The next argument is used by Joel Kupperman and B. C. Postow:[6] When we cite a fact *F* as a reason for a person to act, only to find that the person is indifferent to *F*, we do not always retract our claim that *F* is a practical reason for that person. Sometimes we continue to insist, correctly, that *F* is a reason for the person to act, particularly when *F* shows the action to be morally required. As Postow puts it: "In cases of morality it may sometimes be quite proper for someone else to cite as a reason for me to do an act some fact which does not move me, and still to believe that it is a reason for me to do the act even after being informed that it does not move me. For example, if I am unmoved by injustice, the fact that my proposed act is unjust might still be cited as a reason for me not to do it." This observation, Postow thinks, casts doubt on the claim "that the reason for an action must be capable of motivating the agent who has the reason." Using similar examples, Kupperman argues that "a good reason is a good reason even if it has no persuasive capacity."

The third argument is a natural variation of the second one.[7] This time, the purported counterexample to RM is not a moral consideration, but a consideration of self-interest. Suppose that Frank is in the path of an oncoming bus, and can avoid death only by stepping out of the street. It is in Frank's *interest* to step out of the street; hence he has a *reason* to do so. It would be a mistake to retract this claim even if we knew that Frank could not be influenced by it. Considerations of self-interest are practical reasons even when they cannot motivate.

The final objection is that RM rests on a confusion between reasons and motives.[8] Motives are connected with motivation; so anyone who confuses reasons with motives will think that reasons always motivate. This confusion is easy because many authors speak of "exciting reasons" or "motivating reasons" when they actually are thinking, not of reasons, but of motives. Hence there is a loose sense of the term "reasons" that allows us to say that "reasons are motivators." Proponents of RM have been duped by this use of the term; hence they mistakenly think that reasons must be capable of motivating.

3. Reasons for Action

I suspect that many misgivings about RM stem from a lack of clarity; so before addressing the above objections I will make some points of clarification,

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[6]Kupperman 1970, 125; Postow 1979, 97.

[7]For a version of it see Nathanson 1985, 112. It's also suggested by a passage in Foot 1978, 179.

[8]I address this charge because I think many believe it. The literature on practical reason contains many attempts to parry forms of RM by distinguishing practical reasons from motives (or from explanatory reasons, "exciting" reasons, "motivating facts," etc.), and criticisms of specific proponents of RM on the grounds that they ignore the distinction. Hence it is easy to come away from this literature assuming that RM rests on a confusion. For some examples of this literature see Brink 1989, 39f, 62f; Blake 1928, 138f; Frankena 1958, 44, 57; Baier 1978b, 64f, and Baier 1978a, 233–37, 254 n. 8.

beginning with some points about reasons. First, we must distinguish (a) *Ruth's reasons* for doing *D* from (b) *reasons for* Ruth to do *D*.[9] We cite reasons of the first sort to explain Ruth's actions; we cite those of the second sort to justify actions Ruth did or might do. Reasons of kind (a) always concern actions *actually* performed or intended; this is not true of reasons of kind (b). Nor, by the way, is it true of motives. Ruth can have motives to do *D* without ever doing *D* or intending to do it. Perhaps she has stronger motives to do something else.

RM is about reasons of type (b). To be clear about such reasons, let's consider the view that they differ from another class of justifying reasons, which might appropriately be called "impersonal reasons."[10] Suppose that action *D* is available to several people, including Ruth. Suppose also (*E*) that *D* would contribute to an economically worthy goal. It seems clear that fact (*E*) is an economic reason to do *D*, from which it trivially follows that (*E*) is a reason to do *D*. It is not clear, however, that (*E*) is a reason for *Ruth* (or anyone else) to do *D*. Whether it is that sort of reason, a reason of type (b), depends on other conditions which may or may not be met. Thus, some justifying reasons are not reasons for an *agent* to act. A fact *F* might be a reason to do *D*, and yet fail to be a reason for *X* to do *D*, no matter who person *X* happens to be.

Some philosophers will find this preposterous. They will say that if *F* is a reason to do *D*, it must be a reason for one or more specific *agents* to do *D*. Perhaps they will argue as follows. A condition for Ruth's having a reason to do *D* is that there *be* a reason, a reason for *Ruth*, to do *D*. It is contradictory to say, "Ruth has a reason to do *D*, but there is no reason for Ruth to do *D*." So if *F* were a reason to do *D*, though not a reason for any specific agent, including Ruth, to do *D*, then Ruth's awareness of *F* would not result in her *having* a reason to do *D*, despite *F*'s status as a reason for that action. To put this another way, if *F* could be a reason to do *D* without being a reason for any agent to do *D*, then Ruth could be aware of a reason to do *D* (namely *F*) without having a reason to do *D*. Since the consequent of this claim is counterintuitive, we should deny the antecedent, which is to deny the existence of impersonal reasons.

I will not try to predict the response of those who believe in such reasons, for I intend to grant their thesis. That is, I will grant that a fact can have these properties: first, a statement of the form "That fact is a reason to do *D*" is true of it; but second, no statement of the form "That fact is a reason for *A* to do *D*" is true of it. I also will grant that a fact with these properties is a reason we can be aware of (appreciate, etc.) without *having* a reason to act. Finally, I will grant that such facts retain their status as reasons – impersonal reasons – independently of a tendency to move those who are aware of them.

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[9]For more thorough discussions of this distinction see Darwall 1983, 28ff; and Schueler 1989, 36ff.

[10]The view I have in mind is suggested by a passage in Audi 1986, 513. I do not claim that Audi would endorse this view.

To grant these things is not to abandon RM, but we are unlikely to see this if we think that RM concerns all justifying reasons, including impersonal ones. RM is specifically about reasons of type (b): justifying reasons for *agents* to act, or more clearly, facts that count as reasons because in each case we can truthfully say: "That fact is a reason for *X* (a person) to act." In this essay "reasons" refers to reasons of type (b) unless otherwise indicated.

Such reasons should be distinguished from still another class of justifying reasons, namely, reasons for thinking that *A* ought to do *D*. Perhaps the latter reasons are necessarily capable of motivating, but the truth of RM does not hinge on whether they are. This is because reasons for *A* to do *D* are not simply reasons for thinking that *A* ought to do *D*. There is a simple way of showing this, adapted from G. R. Grice (1978, 213–18). Suppose we know (*C*) that Carl has a conclusive reason to do *D*, and we are asked, "Ought Carl to do *D*?" Given (*C*), we should say yes. But if (*C*) justifies an answer of yes, then (*C*) is a reason for thinking that Carl ought to do *D*. Is (*C*) also a reason for Carl to *do D*? It is not. Given (*C*), Carl indeed has a reason to do *D*, but that reason is not (*C*). Imagine someone saying, "If there is a conclusive reason for Carl to do *D*, tell me what it is," and being told, "The conclusive reason for him to do *D* is that he has a conclusive reason to do *D*." This response is ludicrous, indicating that it fails to do what it purports to do, which is to state a reason for Carl to do *D*.

4. TWO READINGS OF RM

Let us now examine RM, the view that a fact *F* is a reason for *A* to do *D* only if *F* is capable of moving *A* to do *D*. Perhaps we should read it as follows (the subscript will be explained shortly):

> RM_I: A fact *F* is a reason for *A* to do *D* only if, assuming that *A* is aware of *F*, he will be moved to do *D* by his awareness of *F*.

We should note three things about this assertion. First, it contains the word "moved," which I use as a success term. A person is "moved" by *F* to do *D* only if he *does D*.[11] Given this use of the term, RM_I requires a *ceteris paribus* clause; so let's read it with the following proviso: "barring any hindrances to doing *D*, and any reasons that 'compete' with *F*." We must take care in interpreting this proviso, for it will not be adequate unless "compete" and "hindrance" are interpreted liberally. We should regard *F´* as "competing" with *F*, not only if *F´* supports an action other than the one supported by *F*, but if it constitutes an additional reason for the same action. And we should regard

[11] I also use "motivated" this way; I do not do so with "influence" or "affect." For example, a person is "affected" by *F* provided *F inclines* him to do some action *D*, meaning that *F* will move him to do *D* given the proviso in the next sentence.

drowsiness, intoxication, ignorance of how to do *D*, and other such internal conditions as "hindrances" to doing *D*. (But for reasons that will soon be evident, we will not count lapses of rationality as hindrances.)

Second, some proponents of RM might be unhappy with the word "aware" unless we give it a special meaning. For example, they might ask us to read "*A* is aware of *F*" to mean that *A* is not only cognizant of *F*, but conscious of the most obvious implications *F* has for his conduct, at least insofar as that conduct affects himself or others.[12] For instance, if *F* reveals that *D* would satisfy *A*'s desires, or bring *A* pain, or bring *others* pain, then *A* knows this; otherwise he is not truly "aware" of *F*. The point is that some defenders of RM might be dissatisfied with "aware of *F*" unless it refers to a "full-blooded" form of awareness, a form that involves further beliefs about the relations *F* bears to *A*'s actions.[13] This point is worth keeping in mind, but there is no need to examine it at length. The arguments in this essay can be adjusted to accommodate it.

My third and most important point is that RM_I is not plausible, even if we heed my first two remarks about it (hence the subscript "I," for "implausible"). To see this, suppose (*J*) that Jane could satisfy her desire for jam by going to the market. (*J*) is surely a reason for Jane to go to the market, and if Jane is aware of (*J*) then she *has* a reason to go to the market. This is true even if (*J*) has no effect on her. If Jane is unmoved by (*J*) even in the absence of all hindrances and reasons that compete with (*J*), something has gone wrong. But the problem lies with *Jane*, not with the assertion that (*J*) is a reason for Jane to act. To state the point more generally, RM_I is contradicted by the following truth:

> Means/end considerations always count as prima facie reasons, even if they do not influence the relevant agent. If it's a fact that *A* could satisfy his desire for *E* by doing *D*, then that fact is a *reason* for *A* to do *D*, and it remains a reason regardless of whether it moves *A* to do *D*, and even of whether it *would* move *A* to do so in the absence of impediments and competing practical reasons.

Some will object that this point is true of only *some* facts of the form, "*A* could satisfy his desire for *E* by doing *D*."[14] Others will object in a different way, saying that although means/end considerations *guarantee* the existence of

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[12]Some would replace "cognizant" with "cognizant in a *vivid* way." See Falk 1986, 78f, 85, 92.

[13]This is not to say that they demand a reading of "aware of *F*" that would make RM a tautology. It's implausible to read "aware" in a way that would make *being influenced* by a fact a necessary condition for *being aware* of it.

[14]Some tempting ways of developing this objection are blocked by Hubin (1991), who enroute to his conclusions discusses some authors who might make the objection. (This is not to say that his *purpose* is to block the objection. His purpose is to show that no logically satisfiable basic desire is noninstrumentally irrational in any sense that would undermine its tendency to confer rationality on deeds that satisfy it.)

reasons that remain reasons even when they carry no influence, it's not the means/end considerations *themselves* that qualify as the reasons.[15] I disagree with both groups of objectors, but fortunately we need not refute them. We can please both groups by replacing the above point with this: Some means/end considerations count as, or ensure the existence of, prima facie reasons that retain their status as reasons even if they do not influence the relevant agent. This point rules out RM_I just as surely as the original one does, and works equally well in the arguments that follow (*mutatis mutandis*). Those who wish can substitute it for the original point, which I intend to retain.

In making that point I may seem to be criticizing RM, but actually I am putting constraints on how we interpret it. Defenders of RM admit – in fact some insist (e.g., Falk 1986, 87, 94) – that means/end considerations always count as reasons; hence they apparently see RM as *compatible* with that truth. So fairness requires that we assume, at least tentatively, that RM can make room for the fact that means/end considerations are reasons even when they fail to affect behavior.

How can RM make room for that fact? The clue lies in our point about Jane: that if she is unaffected by (*J*) there is something wrong with *her*, not with the claim that (*J*) is a reason for her to act. And what's wrong with her is clearly this: she is being *irrational*.[16] That is, she is failing to exercise one of the capacities that mark her as a rational agent – the capacity to take effective means to her ends. There are many such capacities and traits (e.g., the ability to think consistently, the lack of circular preferences, the knack for tracing out logical connections), and the handiest way to credit a person with their possession and exercise is to describe her as "rational" or as "being rational." So we

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[15]For a view of this sort see Grice 1967, 9f, 15. A third possible objection to my claim about means/end considerations is that it carries a false presupposition, namely, that means/end considerations are sometimes motivationally inert. This presupposition, according to the objection, is ruled out by the fact that if an action is known by a person to promote the achievement of one of his desired ends, the desire for the end is automatically transferred to the action, in which case the action is sure to occur if the agent is not hindered from acting. This objection rests on a false view of motivation – a view that fails to acknowledge breakdowns of motivational transmission which stem from lapses of rationality. It is effectively criticized by Falk 1986, 87f, 91, 97; and Korsgaard 1986, 12ff.

[16]Two comments: First, given the way I use this term and the term "being rational," it is neither contradictory to speak of "a rational agent who is being irrational" nor redundant to speak of "a rational agent who is being rational." For example, a rational agent who is being irrational is a person who, like Jane, qualifies as a rational agent but presently exhibits a failure or defect of rationality. Second, some might replace "being irrational" with "not being fully rational," on the following grounds. If Jane's desire for jam is very weak, then although her failure to be affected by (*J*) is a failure to be fully rational, it is not serious enough to count as *irrational* behavior. The word "irrational" should be reserved for the most flagrant breaches of rationality. (See Baier 1978a, 249f, 255f.) This point, whether plausible or not, is for my purposes minor; so I simply invite those who accept it to read each occurrence of "rational" in this paper to mean "fully rational," and each occurrence of "irrational" to mean "not fully rational." Similar remarks go for the cognates of those terms.

should read RM as saying, not that reasons *necessarily* influence the agents for whom they are reasons, but that they do so *insofar as those agents are rational*.[17] If we read RM the former way, (*J*) would not be a reason for Jane to act, given its failure to affect her. Hence that reading is at odds with our observation about means/end considerations. Our observation is not contradicted if we read RM the second way. Given that reading, (*J*) easily meets the condition stated in RM, because (*J*) surely would affect Jane *if* she were being rational.

In conclusion, fairness requires that we replace RM_I with the *plausible* statement below. It should be read with the same proviso we attached to RM_I, and with the same cautions about interpreting that proviso and about the meaning of "aware."

> RM_P: If *F* is a reason for *A* to do *D*, and *A* is aware of *F*, then *A* will be moved to do *D* by his awareness of *F* – assuming he is being rational.

5. IN DEFENSE OF RM

We now can see why the objections in section 2 do not refute RM. To read RM fairly we must read it, not as RM_I, but as RM_P.[18] The word "must" is important. The point is not that we *can* read RM as RM_P rather than as RM_I, but that to do the opposite is to make RM a straw man. But once we read RM as RM_P, it stands up to the objections in section 2. For instance, the point of the second two objections is that a person's indifference to a fact does not always disqualify the fact as a practical reason. This threatens RM_I (or could do so if suitably embellished), but not RM_P. The latter makes plenty of room for the fact that reasons can fail to affect behavior. Sometimes people are irrational.

Similar remarks apply to the charge that RM rules out the parity we expect between practical and theoretical reasons. This charge is forceful against RM_I;

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[17] See Falk 1986, 94, 97; and especially Korsgaard 1986, 12f, 15. For related comments see Falk 1986, 87–93; and Gaus 1990, 265.

[18] Two remarks: First, I'm speaking as if RM_P and RM_I were the only the possible readings of RM, and I will continue doing so. This is legitimate, given that every admissible reading will either have the virtue exemplified by RM_P – the virtue of tying reasons to *rational* motivation rather than to motivation *simpliciter* – or else resemble RM_I by lacking that virtue. Second, in replacing RM_I with RM_P I am not out of step with other proponents of RM. That is, most such proponents hold either RM_P or a variant of it; they do not hold RM_I. This is true of Harman (1984, 36), Falk (1986, 73 n. 3, 89–91), Darwall (1983, 20, 80f, 128), and Gaus (1990, 266ff), and especially true of Gauthier (1987, 8) and Korsgaard (1986, 15). In fact, defenders of RM_I are rare. Although it is not preposterous to attribute RM_I to David Hume and C. L. Stevenson, a close reading cautions against it. This is because neither philosopher develops a theory of practical, as distinct from theoretical, reasons, but RM_I is specifically about reasons of the former kind. See Hume 1739, 414, 416f; and Stevenson 1944, 27f, 114f, 133.

it backfires if aimed at RM_P. RM_P ties practical reasons to *rational* motivation, meaning motivation that occurs insofar as the agent is rational. This creates exactly the parity we should expect between practical and theoretical reasons.[19] If Frank has, in *p*, a reason to believe *q*, then although his awareness of *p* will not necessarily lead him to believe *q* (even granting our earlier proviso),[20] it will do so *if* he is being rational. To grant a similar point about practical reasons is to grant that if Frank has, in *F*, a reason to do *D*, then *F* will lead him to do *D* if he is being rational (Korsgaard 1986, 14f; Gauthier 1987, 8). This is to grant RM_P.

A possible objection here is that when we identify *p* as a reason for Frank to believe *q*, we do not consult our understanding of what rationality entails; we consult only such things as the canons of logic. This is false. Even if *p* implies *q*, and Frank knows *p*, we cannot be sure that *p* is a reason for Frank to believe *q*. For all we know, the simplest derivation of *q* from *p* involves dozens of steps, replete with multiple quantifiers and modal operators. If so, we will hesitate to count *p* as a reason for Frank to believe *q*. This hesitancy stems from our understanding (fuzzy though it may be) of what rationality entails, and thus of what we can expect of Frank if he is thinking rationally. We can expect him to think logically, but not with the degree of logical skill required to derive *q* from *p*.

This case differs from an earlier one, in which *p clearly* implied *q*. To clearly imply *q* is to imply it in a way that can be detected by any rational person, including Frank. So in such cases, we are quick to say that *p* is a reason for Frank to believe *q*. Our assumptions about rationality are not bypassed; they are given their due through the point that *p* "clearly" implies *q*.

Let's proceed to the fourth objection, which is that RM rests on a confusion between reasons and motives. Apparently, this means that RM is true of motives but patently false of reasons, and hence would be implausible if we clearly distinguished reasons from motives. But there are no grounds for believing this, particularly if we read RM as RM_P. Whatever else a reason is, it is a fact that carries weight with a rational agent, a fact that will influence such an agent if he is being rational. This remains plausible even if we keep in mind the difference between motives and reasons.[21]

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[19]No doubt there are *differences* between the two – differences, for instance, in the kinds of intentional states through which they influence us – but this does not rule out a parity between the two. And a parity is all we should expect.

[20]From here on I will feel free to omit the proviso in those statements in which it would be appropriate. But I mean it to apply whenever I speak of someone being led (moved, motivated) to do or believe something.

[21]This difference cannot be denied. For one thing, reasons are facts or propositions of a certain kind; motives are not. It's safe to say this even though there is no simple answer to the question, "What kind of thing is a motive?" We sometimes use "motive" in place of "goal"; other times we mean a psychological

The key point is that if we interpret RM fairly, if we read it as RM_P, it stands up to the criticisms in section 2. Later I will address objections to this point, but first I will show that many critics of RM are tacitly committed to RM_P. Remarks of the following sort are common among such philosophers:[22]

> There are many explanations for lapses from rationality, and none of us always succeeds in knowing and acting on appropriate reasons. A rational person, however, will be one whose behavior is characteristically tied to reasons in this way . . . .
>
> All rational courses of action [are] courses that are supported by the best reasons . . . . a reason for an action is something like a rational justification for an action.
>
> "*F* is a reason for *X* to do *A*" implies that if *X* were a perfectly rational person, a person conforming to the ideal of rationality, then *F* would *weigh with him* in favor of doing *A*.
>
> Rationality . . . . consists in performance *according to reason*, where that means *according to the balance of reasons*.

It's fair to interpret the quoted authors as holding thesis (1), below. That thesis differs from RM_P, but as I will demonstrate, RM_P follows from it. Because (1) is intuitively plausible, my demonstration counts as a defense of RM_P.[23]

(1) Reasons are facts we are rationally required to act upon. That is, if *F* is a reason for *A* to do *D*, and *A* is both aware of *F* and without any reasons that compete with *F*, then *A* is rationally required to act on *F* and do *D*, assuming she is not hindered from so acting.

From (1) we can easily derive RM_P. Suppose that *F* is a reason for *A* to do *D*, and *A* is aware of *F*. Suppose also that *A* is not hindered from acting on *F*, and *A* has no reasons that compete with *F*. Then (1) implies that *A* is rationally required to act on *F* and do *D*, meaning that she would be irrational not to do so. But this is to say that insofar as she is rational she will act on *F* and do *D*;

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state, or set of such states, with the potential to produce and explain actions. And these do not exhaust the appropriate uses of "motive." For more on reasons vs. motives see Grice 1978, 209ff.

[22]The first remark is Nathanson's (1985, 45); the second is Postow's (1979, 96, 98). The next two are from Baier 1978a, 240 (see also p. 244); and Baier 1986, 14. See also Baier 1978b, 67f; and especially Baier 1965, 45.

[23]Thesis (1) is widely accepted (as indeed it should be), but it's not always explicitly stated. I believe that a close reading of most of the authors cited in this essay reveals a commitment to it – either a direct commitment, or a commitment to one or more theses which, when combined with equally plausible premises, yield (1) as a conclusion. Some examples: Brink 1989, 39, 51 n. 8, 53, 63, 71, 75, 77f; Cohon 1993, 265; Darwall 1983, 19, 31, 199; Foot 1978, 152; Gaus 1990, 265ff; Grice 1967, 134, 138, 139f; Hubin 1991, 31, 34f; Milo 1984, 204, 211, 216f; and of course Baier, Nathanson, and Postow, quoted above.

and this, in turn, is to say that if *A* is being rational she will be moved to do *D* by her awareness of *F*. Therefore:

> RM_P: If *F* is a reason for *A* to do *D*, and *A* is aware of *F*, then barring all impediments and practical reasons that compete with *F*, agent *A* will be moved to do *D* by her awareness of *F* – assuming she is being rational.

If RM_P follows from (1), and if (1) is widely accepted, why do many philosophers deny that every reason for a person to act is capable of moving the person?[24] One reason, no doubt, is that many philosophers either fail to distinguish RM_P from RM_I, or fail to distinguish reasons for *A* to do *D* from justifying reasons *simpliciter*. Another explanation concerns the word "move," cognates of which appear in RM, RM_I, and RM_P. To see how this word creates a problem, let's consider an objection to the above derivation of RM_P from (1).

The objection concerns this premise: from the fact that (a) insofar as *A* is rational she will act on *F* and do *D*, we must conclude that (b) if *A* is being rational she will be moved to do *D* by her awareness of *F*. The objection is that to *act* on fact *F* is not necessarily to be *caused* to act by one's awareness of *F*, but the statement "*A* will be moved to do *D* by her awareness of *F*" is equivalent to "*A* will be caused to do *D* by her awareness of *F*." In other words, (b) presupposes something that (a) does not, namely, that actions are *caused* by psychological states; so the step from (a) to (b) is unwarranted. Also, the difficulty cannot be overcome by rewording the problematic premise. The problem arises because RM_P differs from (1) in the way (b) differs from (a). RM_P contains the term "moved," and thus carries a metaphysical presupposition not shared by (1). So (1) cannot imply RM_P.

This objection contains an error, an error which is an obstacle to accepting RM. The phrase "moved to act" should not be read to mean "caused to act." This reading is not warranted by any technical sense given to "move" by defenders of RM, nor is it justified by that term's ordinary meaning.[25] If Ruth asks, "Whatever moved you to do something so obnoxious!" and Paul replies, "I didn't mean to be obnoxious; I was moved solely by the prospect of livening up the party," neither Ruth nor Paul has asserted or presupposed that Paul's action was *caused*, either by psychological states or by anything else. Paul *acted* on his belief that he could liven up the party, but whether his deed was

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[24] Note 26 is relevant here.

[25] My use of "move" as a success term is not out of the ordinary, even if that's only *one* of its ordinary uses. For documentation of my claim about its use among RM's defenders, see the works in note 18. In those works "motivate" appears more often than "move," but my point holds for both terms. Few proponents of RM use either term in a way that would imply that actions are *caused* in a strict sense. (Perhaps actions *are* caused, and perhaps many defenders of RM believe this, but that's beside the point.)

caused is a metaphysical question that remains to be answered. Conversely, if Paul acted on the belief just cited, we can say that Paul was *moved* by his belief to perform his action. But again, this is not to say Paul's action was *caused*. That is, even if it were decisively shown that no intentional actions are caused, we could not be faulted for saying, "Paul was moved to do what he did by the thought that he could liven up the party." The upshot is that if "move" has an ordinary meaning – and there is no evidence that it doesn't, either in this essay or in those of other defenders of RM – the objection in the preceding paragraph is unsound.

In sum, we have seen a valid argument for RM_P, an argument which proceeds from an assumption that is both intuitively compelling and widely accepted among RM's critics. We also have seen that we should read RM as RM_P, and that RM_P is not refuted by the four criticisms we saw earlier. The main point of this section is this: if the view that reasons are necessarily capable of motivating is interpreted in a way that meets ordinary standards of charity, and hence read as RM_P, it is plausible, well armored against standard criticisms, and supported by premises that its critics generally accept.[26]

6. OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

Before discussing the significance of the above point I will address the following objections. First, RM_P does not overcome the criticisms in section 2. Second, RM_P is trivial. Third, even if RM_P is neither false nor trivial, it is a poor formulation of RM.

6.1. *The "Moral Reasons" Objection*

I said that many critics of RM tacitly accept RM_P. I did not say that all of them do, and we now come to a predictable objection from those who don't. The objection is that RM_P falls to at least one of the criticisms in section 2. I have in mind the second criticism, according to which moral considerations are reasons

[26] A question naturally arises here. Given that many critics of RM tacitly grant RM_P, how can we be sure that the objections in section 2 were intended by their authors to refute RM in general? Perhaps they were aimed solely at RM_I or at some other untenable view. The answer to this question is that indeed, we cannot be sure about the intentions behind the objections. This shows that my criticism of the objections should not be taken as criticism of the respective authors; it does not show that it was pointless to address the objections. In those objections we find no distinction drawn between RM_P and RM_I, much less a warning that only the second of the two views falls to the objections. (And we find no indications that RM is serving as a stand-in for, say, the view that reasons are tied to *desires*. In some cases we find clear indications that it's not doing so. See note 3.) So at first glance, the objections seem to threaten RM in general. I suspect that many philosophers have been swayed by these appearances and have rejected RM as a result.

even when they cannot affect behavior.[27] We can imagine a person, a professional criminal perhaps, who cannot be influenced by moral considerations even when she is being rational. It remains true, however, that such considerations are reasons for her to act. If Frank has been hit by a bus, and Ruth could save his life by calling an ambulance, then Ruth has a reason to call the ambulance. This is true even if Ruth's indifference to Frank's plight is no sign of irrationality – for example, it involves no inconsistent thinking or failure to fit means to ends. Thus, contrary to RM_P, even if a fact *F* is a reason for Ruth to act, we cannot be sure that insofar as Ruth is rational she will be affected by *F*.[28]

The essential point is that the following is an inconsistent triad, and to avoid inconsistency we should reject the third item.

(2) Moral considerations always count as *reasons* for *A* to do *D*, no matter who *A* happens to be (and hence regardless of *A*'s specific desires or interests).

(3) Not everyone is rationally required to be influenced by moral considerations. Some people are indifferent to such considerations even when they are being rational.

(4) *F* is a reason for *A* to do *D* only if *F* can move *A*, insofar as *A* is rational, to do *D*.

Statement (4) is an abbreviation of RM_P; to deny it we must reject not only RM_P, but thesis (1) in section 5. This is too great a price to pay, partly owing to the plausibility of (1),[29] and partly because there are other ways to avoid inconsistency. Ethical rationalists would have us reject (3), arguing that a correct account of morality and practical reason shows that a responsiveness to moral considerations is an inescapable demand of reason. Another proposal, not easily dismissed, is that we reject (2). It's true that we *call* moral considerations reasons for acting, and that we often use "moral considerations" and "moral reasons" interchangeably. This makes (2) initially tempting. But there are plausible explanations for all this, none of them *ad hoc*, that are consistent with denying (2). One explanation is that although moral considerations are not

[27]Some might say that RM_P is also open to the third criticism in section 2. What I say below can be adjusted to apply to that criticism.

[28]For this view see Warnock 1971, 86, 162–66; and especially Richards 1971, 75–80, 219f, 228ff, 280ff.

[29]What (1) says about reasons cannot be circumvented by replacing "reason" with "moral reason." If *F* is a moral reason for Ruth to call an ambulance – meaning a genuine moral *reason*, and moreover, a moral reason *for Ruth* to call an ambulance – it follows trivially that *F* is reason for Ruth to call an ambulance, in which case *F* is among the items to which (1) pertains.

always reasons of the kind spoken of in (2), they always are reasons of *some* kind – for instance, impersonal reasons or reasons for thinking that *D* would be good or right. Another explanation is that given the desires people typically have (some of which stem from the internalization of moral rules), if *F* is a moral consideration favoring an action available to person *X*, then *F* almost surely will be a reason for *X* to act, no matter who *X* happens to be.[30] But "almost surely" is not the same as "necessarily," meaning that *X* might be an atypical person, a person whose desires are such that moral considerations provide him with no reasons to act. So this explanation is compatible with denying (2). More important, the availability of such explanations makes it *reasonable* to deny (2), providing a way of meeting the above objection to RM_P.

Perhaps our objector, taking his cue from Brink (1992, 8), will reply that "reason for *A* to do *D*" is ambiguous. One sense of that term makes (4) true; a second makes it false. A reason for *A* to do *D*, in the second sense, exists if *some* behavioral norms (moral, legal, etc.) apply to person *A*. Not all such reasons are tied to norms of rationality, meaning that *A* can be indifferent to many such reasons while being fully rational. So for one sense of "reason for *A* to do *D*," we should reject (4).

This reply is ineffective. For one thing, it allows us to retain (4) for one sense of "reason for *A* to do *D*." For another, it is not plausible. It's an example of the all too common practice of postulating, rather than detecting, different "senses" of a term. The term "reason for *A* to do *D*" differs in meaning from many related items, including "reason to do *D*," "*A*'s reason for doing *D*," "*A*'s motives for doing *D*," and "reason for thinking that *A* ought to do *D*." Perhaps it is sometimes used, imprecisely, in place of one of these items. But once we distinguish it from such items we have no grounds for making a further distinction between different *senses* of the term itself.

6.2. *The "Triviality" Objection*

We have met the objection in section 6.1, but we have not shown it to be silly. Those who reject (4) are neither confused nor blind to the obvious. They are convinced of two things: that moral considerations are reasons for every rational person; and that demands of practical rationality merely relate a person's actions, intentions, etc. to her desires (interests, pro-attitudes), which is not to ensure that her desires are of a kind that can be engaged by moral considerations. Both things are plausible, but if granted they rule out something hard to doubt, namely (4). Some are willing to pay the price, maintaining that rationality does not demand responsiveness to *every* fact that counts as a reason.

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[30] See Milo 1984, 214. For an explanation in the same vein see Foot 1978, 153. Milo and Foot would endorse the proposal to reject (2) in favor of (3) and (4). See Milo 1984, 202–17; and Foot 1978, 151–56, 161f, 168 n. 8.

These observations are pertinent to the next objection, which is that RM_P is trivial. By "trivial" the objector does not mean "necessary" or "analytic." (If he did, his point might be true, but it would lack force as an objection. Analytic truths can be illuminating and important.) He means "indisputable and philosophically void." To be rational is simply to be responsive to reasons; so RM_P is circular. It essentially says that if *F* is a reason for *A* to act, then insofar as *A* is responsive to what count for him as reasons to act, he will be responsive to *F*. One result is that RM_P is indisputable; another is that it is void in this sense: it does not help us pare down the number of facts we are inclined to count as reasons. If we think that *F* is a reason for *A* to do *D*, no amount of reflection on RM_P will cause us to change our mind.

This objection is flawed in two ways, one of which has been indicated: Although no one can deny that agents who are being rational are responsive to *most* of those facts which count for them as reasons (e.g., means/end considerations), a person can intelligently deny that such agents are responsive to *every* such fact. This, in effect, is to deny RM_P. I have indicated both the reasoning behind this denial and my grounds for rejecting it. But to reject it is not to show it to be ludicrous, as it would be if RM_P were indisputable.

Second, RM_P is not philosophically void. It places a weak, but important, condition on practical reasons. Were we to list the capacities and traits that are essential to being rational, we would not stop with the point that to be rational is to be swayed by reasons. Indeed, our preanalytic understanding of rationality is too rich to be captured in a tidy list. And it often can, and should, prompt us to reconsider whether this or that fact is a reason for *A* to do *D*. (This does not rule out an influence in the other direction. Sometimes our intuitions about what count as reasons can, and should, influence our views about what rationality entails. This occurred in section 4.)

For example, when presented with the fact that

> (*T*) if everyone were to do what Ted is tempted to do, namely *D*, then everyone, including Ted, would be better off than they would be were they to refrain from doing *D*,

many philosophers are quick to say that Ted has, in (*T*), a reason to do *D*. But when they are persuaded or reminded of RM_P, they have second thoughts. It is easy to find cases in which Ted's total indifference to (*T*) seems perfectly rational.[31] It involves no inconsistent beliefs, no blunders in reasoning, no self-defeating choices – in short, no shortcomings or failures that clearly count as defects of rationality. In such cases, it is appropriate to reconsider whether (*T*) is a reason for Ted to act. It is not appropriate to insist, "But there must be *some*

[31] An example is the interactive situation known as the Prisoner's Dilemma. Some classic readings on it are in Barry and Hardin 1982.

defect of rationality here. Never mind that I can't put my finger on it, and that when someone asks, 'But what's so *irrational* about Ted's behavior?' I find myself stumped. After all, I concluded a moment ago that (*T*) is a reason for Ted to act, and that closes the question whether Ted would be irrational were he to remain unaffected by (*T*)." This is inappropriate because it presupposes, falsely, that our notion of rationality cannot illuminate our notion of reasons for acting, that the illumination always goes in the other direction.

A more general point is in order. Many of our intuitions about what count as practical reasons result from things, including wishful thinking and moral education, that proceed without regard to the condition stated in RM_P. As a result, philosophical literature is rife with examples of "reasons" that would rarely be counted as such if RM_P were kept in mind. This is especially true in ethics, where, as Scott Meikle points out (1974, 66), "at every other turn there looms some rampaging ethical certainty seeking its will of philosophical psychology." Far from being philosophically void, RM_P is a thesis which, if given its due, would drastically reduce the number of unargued assumptions philosophers make about practical reasons.[32]

6.3. *The "Faulty Formulation" Objection*

The final objection is that although RM_P is neither false nor trivial, it is a faulty reading of RM. The objection is most likely to come from philosophers who are tempted by RM but think that to read it as RM_P is to rob it of an attractive property. The objection is this: An essential feature of the reasons-as-motivators view is that it ensures a close link between justifying and explanatory reasons.[33] Indeed, when we say that reasons motivate actions we mean little else than that reasons *explain* actions. So any genuine version of RM implies that if *A* has a reason to do *D*, then *A* either has, or is only a short step away from having, a set of psychological states that can fully explain his doing *D*. More precisely, if *A* has, in fact *F*, a justifying reason to do *D*, then once *A* becomes aware of *F* we can be sure that *A* has a "belief-desire pair" (or perhaps only a belief) that is sufficient to explain his doing *D*.[34] The belief-component

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[32]An example of such an assumption is Hospers' claim (1982, 29f) that if someone demands a reason for doing what morality demands, we need only point out that it's the morally right thing to do.

[33]What I am calling an "explanatory reason" is one of things commonly meant by a "motive" (see note 21); hence our objector's assumption is a variation of the one discussed in note 8. It differs from that one in being more moderate. The objection I build on it is suggested by a passage in Postow 1979, 100 n. 8. This is not to say that Postow would endorse the objection.

[34]This sentence might be troubling owing to the parenthetical remark, and to the suggestion that a person can have, in *F*, a reason to act, even if she is unaware of *F*. The parenthetical remark, which for simplicity I will not repeat, makes room for Kantian brands of RM (which maintain that some beliefs can prompt actions independently of desires). The suggestion about "having reasons" is true. For a brief explanation see Grice 1978, 210.

of that pair is *A*'s awareness of *F*. When *A* is led to do *D* by that belief-desire pair, his belief and desire *fully* explain his action; there is no need for a lengthier explanation. To put this another way, any genuine brand of RM implies the following: If a belief-desire pair *P*, the belief-component of which is *A*'s awareness of *F*, cannot *by itself* explain *A*'s doing *D* on those occasions when it contributes to *A*'s doing *D* (i.e., when it's the belief-desire pair that underlies the action), then *F* is not a (full) justifying reason for *A* to do *D*.

But according to our objector, to grant RM_P is not to grant the preceding assertion, the one implied by any genuine brand of RM. This is because RM_P is compatible with the view that *F* can be a reason for *A* to do *D* even if *F* moves *A* only when *A* is being rational. Suppose that fact (*G*) is of this sort, and *A* is aware of (*G*). Sometimes, (*G*) moves *A* to do *D*. On these occasions, *A* has a belief-desire pair, the belief-component of which is his awareness of (*G*), and that belief-desire pair leads him to do *D*. On other occasions, *A* has the given belief-desire pair, but owing to his irrationality he is not led to do *D*. But if this sometimes happens, how can the belief-desire pair fully explain *A*'s action on those occasions when, owing to *A*'s rationality, it leads him to do *D*? Presumably, on such occasions a *full* explanation of *A*'s action will cite the belief-desire pair *and* the fact that *A* was being rational. The upshot is that *A* can have, in (*G*), a justifying reason to do *D*, even if the belief-desire pair in which (*G*) figures cannot fully explain *A*'s doing *D*. This implication, which is consistent with RM_P, is at odds with RM as it is usually understood. So RM_P is a counterfeit form of RM.

This objection fails even if we grant the objector's claim about "genuine" brands of RM. This is because a belief-desire pair can fully explain an action *D* without being the sole contribution to the occurrence of *D*. In particular, it can fully explain *D* even if a second contributing factor was the agent's rationality. The latter contribution, the fact that the agent was being rational, is a *background assumption* against which our explanation proceeds; it is not part of the explanation itself. More fully, when we explain a person's deed by citing a belief-desire pair, we are putting forward (normally, anyway) a *reason-explanation*, and such explanations proceed on the assumption that the person was being rational. This is one of the distinguishing features of such explanations.[35] One consequence is that reason-explanations do not *include* the point that the agent was being rational at the time of action. There is no need to include it, for it's already present in the background assumptions. Our objector goes wrong because he ignores this feature of such explanations, or because he forgets that an explanation which cites a belief-desire pair is normally a reason-

[35]See Føllesdal 1982, 307, 312. (But see also note 36.) The rationality assumption, by the way, is a bit more complicated than I have suggested. What we assume is not simply "that the person was rational," but something like this: the person was the kind of being (a rational agent) whose behavior we can expect to be minimally, and sometimes fully, rational.

explanation. At any rate, his objection fails. It does not show that RM_P is a counterfeit brand of RM.[36]

7. SOME PHILOSOPHICAL CONSEQUENCES

The results of section 5 bear on other philosophical issues. For example, RM figures centrally in Harman's defense of moral relativism (1975, 1984), Darwall's criticisms of moral nonnaturalism (1983, 55ff), and Falk's rejection of the emotivist view of guidance by reasons (1986, chap. 4). It is equally central in Korsgaard's defense of ethical rationalism against "motivational skepticism" (1986), and Gaus's rejection of "simple rationalism" in favor of "value-grounded rationalism" (1990, chap. 6). In all of these projects RM does the philosophical work assigned to it if read as RM_P or as a variant thereof, which means that contrary to what some philosophers think (see note 3), the listed projects are not weak at those points where their authors link reasons to motivation. Space precludes a full discussion of these projects; so I will limit my attention to two simple arguments that can be extracted from (but are not unique to) the works of Falk and Harman. This will suffice to illustrate the importance of the results of section 5.

First argument: (1) An agent *A* is morally required (or has a moral duty, or morally ought) to do *D* only if there is a reason for *A* to do *D*. (2) A fact (proposition, etc.) is a reason for *A* to do *D* only if it can move *A* to do *D*. (3) Whether a fact can move *A* to do *D* depends on whether *A*'s interests or desires would be served by doing *D*. Thus, (4) *A* is morally required to do *D* only if his interests or desires would be served by doing *D*.

Second argument: (1´) If an agent *A* demands a justification for doing *D*, perhaps by asking, "Why should I do *D*?," we can meet his demand only if there is a reason for *A* to do *D*. Perhaps *D* is the act of complying with morality as such, or is a particular deed prescribed by morality. (2) A fact is a reason for *A* to do *D* only if it can move *A* to do *D*. (3) Whether a fact can move *A* to do *D* depends on whether *A*'s interests or desires would be served by doing *D*. Thus, (4´) if *A* demands a justification for doing *D*, where *D* is either the act of complying with morality as such, or is a particular deed prescribed by morality, we can meet *A*'s demand only if *A*'s interests or desires would be served by doing *D*.

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[36]Some might object to all this by saying that the assumption of rationality is not part of the *background* of a reason-explanation, but a component of the explanation itself (e.g., Føllesdal [1982] seems to think this). There is no need to quarrel over this point, for if it is true, no belief-desire pair can *fully* explain an action. The full explanation must include, along with a reference to the belief and desire, a premise about the agent's rationality. This makes the condition placed on RM by our original objector so unreasonable that we never should have granted it, even for the sake of argument. I have in mind his claim that "genuine" forms of RM imply that *F* is a justifying reason for *A* to do *D* only if the belief-desire pair in which *F* figures can fully explain *A*'s doing *D*.

Each of these arguments supports a brand of agent-relativism about ethics. By the latter I mean any view that ties a person's moral requirements, or else his warrant for doing what morality demands, to *his* particular needs, desires, or interests. A popular objection to such arguments is that they gloss over a crucial distinction, perhaps by conflating two different types of reasons, or by conflating reasons with motives. (See Blake 1928, 136–39; Frankena 1958, 44f, 57; Baier 1978a, 233–37; Baier 1978b, 64f; and Brink 1989, 62f.) There is more than one way to flesh out this objection, one of which is this: The premises of the above arguments are plausible only if "reason for *A* to do *D*" has a different referent in (1) and (1′) than it has in (2). (1) and (1′) are plausible only if the term is used correctly, but (2) is plausible only if the term is used, imprecisely, to refer to a *motive*. If we clean up the arguments so that their premises are precise as well as defensible, both arguments are clearly invalid.

This objection fails. To see this, we need only note that (2) is a rough statement of RM. We should read it as RM_P, and revise (3) accordingly. The result is this: (2) A fact *F* is a reason for *A* to do *D* only if, assuming that *A* is aware of *F* and is not hindered from acting, his awareness of *F* moves him, insofar as he is rational, to do *D*. (3) Whether *F* can move *A*, insofar as *A* is rational, to do *D* depends on whether *A*'s interests or desires would be served by doing *D*.

With (2) and (3) revised this way, it is simply false that the plausibility of the two arguments for agent-relativism derives from a shift in the referent of "reason for *A* to do *D*." That is, once we revise (2) to include "insofar as he is rational," there is no reason to think that (2) is true only of motives, explanatory reasons, or other items that differ from the reasons in (1) and (1′). In the first place, there is no reason to think that "reason for *A* to do *D*" is used differently in (1) and (1′) than it is used in RM_P. For instance, (1) is plausible partly because we assume that morality is both normative and action-guiding, an assumption that is easily accommodated if moral demands are tied to reasons of the kind in RM_P. Such reasons are normative because they *rationally* influence anyone for whom they are reasons, making them relevant to what the person rationally ought to do. And they clearly are action-guiding because they rationally *influence* anyone for whom they are reasons. But if the reasons in (1) are the same as those in RM_P, they are the same as those in (2). After all, (2) merely repeats RM_P.

The upshot is that one cannot refute the two arguments for agent-relativism in the simple way discussed above. Nor can one do so by denying (2), because (2) is true. To refute the arguments one must refute either (1) and (1′) or the revised version of (3). This is no easy task. To refute the revised form of (3) was one of Kant's goals in arguing for the possibility of a categorical imperative, and he was not mistaken in saying that the task calls for "a special

and difficult effort."[37] Nor is the task much easier if focused on (1) and (1´). For example, it's hard to see how *A* could be morally required to do *D* but have no *reason* to do *D*. Even if we could find in our language a use of "moral requirement" that ensured a logical gap between moral requirements and practical reasons, many would argue, plausibly, that we should revise our language to remove the gap. After all, there is little point to convincing a person that he is morally required to do *D*, if he can grant what we say and still ask for a reason to do *D*.

8. SUMMARY

RM, the view that "reasons for *A* to do *D* are necessarily capable of moving *A* to do *D*," can be read in two ways, only one of which results in a tenable view. If we read RM charitably, as saying that reasons influence agents insofar as those agents are rational, four things are true. First, the resulting thesis is not a counterfeit brand of RM; it is simply RM, correctly formulated. Second, RM withstands the criticisms in section 2. For it does not rest on a confusion between reasons and motives; it does not rule out the parity we expect between practical and theoretical reasons; and it does not imply that reasons cease to be reasons whenever they fail to affect behavior. Third, RM follows from a premise that is intuitively plausible and accepted by most of RM's critics. Fourth, the correct formulation of RM, as well as the *fact* that RM must be formulated that way, has implications for other issues. For one thing, it shows that agent-relativism about ethics cannot be countered as easily as some have thought.[38]

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[37]Kant 1785, 420. To appreciate the difficulty of the task, one need only browse through Bittner's survey and criticism of some of the attempts to accomplish it. See Bittner 1989, especially chapters 2 and 5.

[38]I'm grateful to the editor and referees of *Erkenntnis* for useful criticisms and suggestions, and to Ellery Eells, Richard Fumerton, and Dennis Stampe for helpful discussions of some of the topics addressed here. I'm especially grateful to Michael Burke, who made valuable comments on several earlier versions of this paper.

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