The Reasoning View and Defeasible Practical Reasoning

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ABSTRACT: According to the Reasoning View about normative reasons, facts about normative reasons for action can be understood in terms of facts about the norms of practical reasoning. I argue that this view is subject to an overlooked class of counterexamples, familiar from debates about Subjectivist theories of normative reasons. Strikingly, the standard strategy Subjectivists have used to respond to this problem cannot be adapted to the Reasoning View. I think there is a solution to this problem, however. I argue that the norms of practical reasoning, like the norms of theoretical reasoning, are characteristically defeasible, in a sense I make precise. Recognizing this property of those norms makes space for a solution to the problem. The resulting view is in a way analogous to familiar defeasibility theories of knowledge, but it avoids a standard objection to that theory.

Introduction

It is a commonplace to observe that there is a connection between the idea of a normative reason and the idea of good reasoning. As Paul Grice put it, "reasons […] are the stuff of which reasoning is made."[1] Using a consideration as a premise in a piece of reasoning—making an inference on the basis of it—is a paradigmatic way of treating that consideration as a reason. And, very often, when we engage in good reasoning we are responding to the considerations that really are the normative reasons that support our conclusions. One question these reflections give rise to lies in the philosophy of mind, broadly construed: what is the relationship between acting for a reason and engaging in reasoning or inference? A second, which will be my focus here, is a question in normative philosophy: what is the relationship between normative reasons (that is, good reasons) and the norms of reasoning?

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[1] (Grice 2001, 67)

The Reasoning View about normative reasons is the idea that facts about the norms of reasoning are in some sense prior to facts about normative reasons. On this view, roughly speaking, what it is for a consideration to be a normative reason is for it to make sense to use that consideration as a premise in one's reasoning.[2] This contrasts with the view that facts about normative reasons are primitive, and that good reasoning should be understood as reasoning that somehow tracks those facts. It also contrasts with the skeptical view that there is no systematic relationship between reasons and reasoning.[3] And it can be seen as contrasting, in spirit, with many versions of Subjectivism about normative reasons (according to which facts about reasons for action are to be analyzed terms of facts about desires) and many versions of Objectivism about normative reasons (according to which facts about reasons for action are to be analyzed in terms of facts about value or obligation).[4]

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[2] The Reasoning View was widespread in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It was defended then by Bernard Williams, Gilbert Harman, Joseph Raz, and Paul Grice, in, e.g., (Raz 1978; Raz 1975; Grice 2001; Williams 1981a; Williams 1995a; Harman 1986). More recently it has been revived by philosophers interested specifically in normative reasons for action, including, Kieran Setiya, Jonathan Way and Conor McHugh, Matthew Silverstein, and myself, in, e.g., (Setiya 2007; Setiya 2014; Silverstein 2016; Way, 2015; McHugh and Way 2016a; Asarnow 2016). Compare also (Hookway 2006; Brandom 2000; Wedgwood 2011), who have defended versions of the Reasoning View about normative reasons for belief. I borrow the name "Reasoning View" from (Way, 2015).

[3] For theories that take facts about normative reasons to be primitive, see, e.g., (Scanlon 1998, ch. 1; Parfit 2011, ch. 3).

[4] Importantly, many versions of the Reasoning View (including Williams' famous version and my own) are what I call "mixed" theories, as they analyze facts about normative reasons in terms of facts about the norms of practical reasoning as well as facts about desires or values. However, the Reasoning View contrasts in spirit with those versions of Subjectivism and Objectivism that give the norms of practical reasoning no role to play. For Objectivist theories, see, e.g., (Raz 1999; Quinn 1993; Broome 2013; Brunero 2013; Kearns and Star 2009; Crisp 2006). Subjectivist theories are most closely associated with Bernard Williams, as in (Williams 1981a; Williams 1995a; Williams 1995b; Williams 2001; Williams 1981b). See also (Schroeder 2007; Goldman 2009; Sobel 2001; Smith 2004), as well as, arguably, (Markovits 2010; Manne 2013; Street 2008). Note that mixed theories, in my sense, are in an important way unlike what Ruth Chang has called "hybrid" theories, as in (Chang 2013). A hybrid theory, in Chang's sense, is one in which each normative reason fact is grounded in exactly one kind of other fact (that is, facts about desires, or facts about values, but not both). Theories that mix the Reasoning View and Subjectivism or Objectivism will hold that many facts about normative reasons are grounded in both facts about the norms of reasoning and some other kind of fact.

In the recent literature there has been a proliferation of positive arguments for the Reasoning View, which I will mention only briefly here. According to Conor McHugh and Jonathan Way, the Reasoning View is the best candidate for a theory that can tell a unified story about the nature of reasons and reasoning in general, as well as a unified story about the nature of normative reasons for various kinds of agential responses (including action and belief).[5] I have argued elsewhere, and Kieran Setiya has also suggested, that the Reasoning View about reasons for action offers a wide range of attractive features of many Subjectivist and Objectivist theories, but avoids the characteristic problems those theories face.[6] According to Matthew Silverstein, the Reasoning View provides an analysis of normative reasons for action that is well-suited to attractive versions of metaethical reductionism.[7]

My project here is to contribute to the development of the Reasoning View (as a theory about reasons for action) by defending it against an important objection.[8] Responding to this objection, I argue, requires proponents of the Reasoning View to reconsider how they conceive of the norms of reasoning.

In Section 1 of the paper, I describe what I take to be the most promising formulation of the Reasoning View about normative reasons for action. In Section 2, I argue that this version of the Reasoning View overgenerates normative reasons in a wide variety of cases. These are the same cases that have prompted many Subjectivists to incorporate an element of psychological idealization in their theories. In Section 3, I argue that, strikingly, an appeal to idealization does not help the Reasoning View avoid this problem.

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[5] See, e.g., (McHugh and Way 2016a; Way, 2015; McHugh and Way 2016b).

[6] See (Asarnow 2016, Setiya 2007; Setiya 2014).

[7] See (Silverstein 2016). Note that the Reasoning View per se is neutral between a variety of metaethical theories, including non-reductive theories and quasi-realist theories. On this point, compare (Blackburn 2010, 248–250).

[8] I set aside reasons for belief and for other kinds of agential responses in this paper.

My diagnosis of the problem is that it arises from how proponents of the Reasoning View have conceived of the norms of practical reasoning. In Section 4, I give four reasons to believe that the norms of practical reasoning are characteristically defeasible, in a sense familiar from discussions of defeasible theoretical reasoning in epistemology and philosophical logic. I argue that recognizing the defeasibility of practical reasoning is consequential, as it makes room for a version of the Reasoning View that avoids the overgeneration problem. In the final section of the paper I address an objection to this approach analogous to a well-known objection to a structurally similar class of epistemological theories, namely defeasibility theories of knowledge.

1. The Reasoning View

In a slogan (to be made more precise below), the Reasoning View holds that normative reasons are premises in possible pieces of good reasoning. What is meant here by good reasoning? Reasoning, in this context, is a kind of conscious, rule-guided transition of thought, in which an agent begins with a set of thoughts (the "premise thoughts") and on the basis of those thoughts somehow alters her overall mental state.[9] This alteration can involve forming a new belief or intention (which I call a "conclusion thought"). Or it can involve altering one's mind in another way, including by suspending judgment, giving up an intention, or changing one's degree of credence. Different types of reasoning are distinguished by their products: theoretical

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[9] Reasoning, in this sense, contrasts with non-inferential transitions of thought such as those characteristic of wishful thinking and free association. Distinguishing reasoning from other kinds of transitions of thought, and distinguishing among different varieties of reasoning (some more conscious and voluntary, some more automatic), are difficult problems. There is room for disagreement about these issues among proponents of the Reasoning View. For discussion, see, e.g., (Broome 2013; Arpaly and Schroeder 2012; Boghossian 2014; Hlobil 2013; Broome 2003; Harman 1986; Harman 2001; McHugh and Way, 2016b).

reasoning is reasoning whose products are changes in overall belief state, and practical reasoning is reasoning whose products are changes in one's intentions.[10]

Reasoning is governed by norms. This means that token pieces of reasoning (token transitions of thought) that agents engage in can be evaluated as either good or bad *qua* reasoning. Typically, a person who reasons in accordance with *modus ponens* has reasoned well, whereas a person who affirms the consequent has reasoned badly. The norms of reasoning (or rules of reasoning) pick out certain patterns of reasoning (construed *in abstracto*) as good patterns of reasoning. Conforming to these norms of reasoning provides a necessary but not sufficient for a token instance of reasoning counting as good reasoning, full stop.[11] The norms of reasoning are insensitive to the truth or falsity of premises: we can reason well from our false beliefs.

This picture of the norms of practical reasoning generates not only facts about the goodness or badness of actual transitions of thought, but also about the goodness or badness of merely possible transitions of thought. For example, there is a fact about whether the norms of reasoning endorse the transition from a possible belief that *p* to a possible belief that *p or q*. When the norms of reasoning endorse such a transition, then I say it is, in general, good reasoning to reason that way. *Modus ponens* reasoning is, in general, good reasoning.

The version of the Reasoning View that I think is most attractive can be stated precisely in terms of this idea. Roughly, for R to be a normative reason for A to ϕ is for the norms of reasoning to endorse the transition from a belief that R (perhaps along with some other attitudes)

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[10] The latter commitment is controversial. I assume it for simplicity but nothing in my argument will turn on it. For an alternate view, see, e.g., (Dancy 2004).

[11] There may be other necessary conditions for a token instance of reasoning to count as good reasoning. For example, Broome argues that good reasoning requires not just conforming to a norm of reasoning, but being guided by that norm. See (Broome 2013, 242). Compare (McHugh and Way 2016b, 3–4).

to A's intention that A ϕ.[12] Because many normative reasons are complex sets of facts I state the view formally in the following way. Where A is an agent and ϕ is an action:

REASONING VIEW — A normative reason for A to ϕ is a set of facts, F, such that the norms of practical reasoning endorse the transition from a set of mental states including beliefs with those facts as their contents and (optionally) one or more elements of A's practical standpoint, to A's intention that A ϕ.[13]

Two aspects of this principle require elaboration. First, by "A's practical standpoint" I mean (a subset of) A's actual pro-attitudes (that is, the motivational states in her psychology), perhaps moderately idealized. This clause allows for A's pro-attitudes to generate normative reasons for her to act, but it also allows proponents of the Reasoning View to disagree about exactly which of her pro-attitudes generate normative reasons (by disagreeing about which ones constitute her practical standpoint in the relevant sense).[14]

Second, while the set may contain possible beliefs in facts other than F, including beliefs in facts that A does not actually have, it may not contain false beliefs. Normative reasons are

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[12] I say "A's intention that A ϕ" to distinguish A's intentions about her own behavior from her intentions that others act in certain ways. For discussion of whether such violations of the so-called "own action condition" on intention are metaphysically possible, see, e.g., (M. E. Bratman 2014, chap. 2)

[13] Here I assume that ϕ is an action indexed to a time. Note that the Reasoning View plausibly also requires a minimality condition on sets of premises, which would prevent beliefs in irrelevant facts from counting as normative reasons for every action. I ignore that complication here. Elsewhere I have argued that principles like REASONING VIEW require a further amendment in order to account for cases in which elements of the agent's practical standpoint provide reasons for her (see Asarnow 2016). Here, for simplicity, I follow the contrasting approach of Setiya and McHugh and Way (in, e.g., (Setiya 2014; McHugh and Way 2016a). Nothing in my argument turns on this aspect of the view.

[14] Compare the disagreements between such Subjectivist theories as those defended in (Williams 1981a; Smith 2004; Goldman 2009; Frankfurt 2006).

possible premises in (so to speak) sound pieces of reasoning. I call this clause the "Soundness Condition" on reasons.[15]

The principle just stated does not answer two important questions that divide proponents of the Reasoning View. One concerns whether all good pieces of reasoning include at least one motivational state as a premise state. Williams famously answered this question in the affirmative, leading to his "internalist" theory of reasons.[16] Others may disagree, for example if they hold that enkratic reasoning is good reasoning and that normative and evaluative thoughts are beliefs rather than motivational states.[17] The second question concerns whether all other types of normative and evaluative facts can be analyzed in terms of facts about reasons and reasoning. REASONING VIEW is compatible both with highly ambitious theories that attempt such analyses and with less ambitious theories that allow for the existence of normative and evaluative facts that cannot be so analyzed. As will become clear in Section 4 below, my sympathy is with the latter class of views, but REASONING VIEW does not require that commitment.[18]

2. The Overgeneration Problem

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[15] Strictly speaking, the Soundness Condition is an optional commitment for the Reasoning View; a proponent of the Reasoning View might deny it, though I do not know of any such proponents who do. For intuitive motivation of the Soundness Condition see (Williams 1981a). Compare (McHugh and Way 2016a).

[16] For discussion, see (Williams 1981a; Williams 1995a). Note that this commitment renders Williams' theory mixed.

[17] I defend the latter view in (Asarnow 2016). It also appears to be the view of (McHugh and Way 2016a). Both of those views are also mixed theories. On enkratic reasoning, see, e.g., (Broome 2013, chap. 13). Note that those who hold that normative and evaluative beliefs are motivational states will reject the dichotomy this question assumes.

[18] On this point, see (Asarnow 2016); the view may be shared by (Setiya 2007; Setiya 2014). For highly ambitious versions of the Reasoning View see (Williams 1981a; Williams 1981b; Silverstein 2016). McHugh and Way hold that facts about the norms of reasoning can be further reduced to facts about fittingness, and that all normative and evaluative facts can be reduced to fittingness facts (see (McHugh and Way 2016a)).

The problem I will raise for the Reasoning View, which I call the Overgeneration Problem, a problem of extensional adequacy. I argue that the Reasoning View overgenerates reasons in two important classes of cases. One of these classes is familiar from Williams' discussion of normative reasons (though I think it is worth re-emphasizing). The other is novel: I argue that the Reasoning View has a highly implausible consequence that many Subjectivist philosophers have designed their theories to avoid.

My argument turns on an assumption about the norms of practical reasoning: the norms of practical reasoning endorse some kind of instrumental reasoning. A piece of instrumental reasoning is a transition from premise thoughts including a pro-attitude that specifies an end or goal (such as the intention to stay dry) and a means-ends belief specifying how to accomplish that goal (such as a belief that taking an umbrella is a means to staying dry), to a conclusion thought that consists in an intention to take the relevant means (such as an intention to take an umbrella). There is substantial controversy concerning what exactly constitutes good instrumental reasoning. Is it only intentions that can set ends in instrumental reasoning, or can (mere) desires do so as well? Must the means-ends belief specify a necessary means, or only a sufficient means? In what sense must they be necessary, or sufficient?[19] The problem I will describe will arise for any plausible account of instrumental reasoning.

The assumption that the norms of practical reasoning endorse the transition from ends to means is an idea shared by a wide range of philosophers with a wide range of commitments and outlooks.[20] This assumption is consistent with the idea that the norms of practical reasoning

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[19] On these debates, see, e.g., (Kenny 1966; Geach 1966; Anscombe 1995; von Wright 1963; von Wright 1972; Audi 1982; Broome 2013).

[20] The assumption is defended by such different philosophers as John Broome, Christine Korsgaard, and Bernard Williams. See, e.g., (Broome 2013, ch. 14, Korsgaard 2008, Williams 1981a, 103-15). While Williams famously has a highly inclusive conception of good reasoning, he includes instrumental reasoning as a special case. While there

endorse other kinds of reasoning as well, such as reasoning from moral beliefs or enkratic reasoning more broadly. It is not to be confused with the highly controversial idea that instrumental reasoning is the only kind of reasoning endorsed by the norms of practical reasoning, a commitment sometimes called "instrumentalism."[21] Many philosophers who reject instrumentalism accept the assumption my argument makes.

While this assumption has broad appeal, it combines with REASONING VIEW to generate two classes of implausible consequences. The first class concerns vicious or malevolent agents, such as Caligula.[22]

CALIGULA   Caligula desires pleasure and believes (what is true) that harming

                    innocents will bring him pleasure.

Many philosophers, myself included, accept the following:

SQUEAMISHNESS   There is no normative reason for Caligula to harm innocents.

The desire for pleasure does not always give us reasons for action.[23]

As Williams himself emphasized, principles like REASONING VIEW are inconsistent with SQUEAMISHNESS.[24] Assuming that the norms of practical reasoning endorse some form

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are some philosophers who deny that there is such a thing as instrumental reasoning, it is hard to imagine that any proponents of the Reasoning View—regardless of their other commitments—would do so.

[21] As in (Lavin 2004, 433).

[22] On Caligula, see e.g., (Gibbard 1999, 145ff).

[23] Note that SQUEAMISHNESS is stronger than the claim that Caligula ought not to harm innocents, all things considered.

[24] In, e.g., (Williams 1981b). McHugh and Way notice this as well, and design their theory to avoid SQUEAMISHNESS (see (McHugh and Way 2016a, 587–588)). Unfortunately, their approach is subject to

of instrumental reasoning, then the norms of practical reasoning will endorse the transition from Caligula's desire to have pleasure, along with the true belief that harming innocents will bring him pleasure, to an intention to harm innocents. According to REASONING VIEW, the existence of such a sound piece of reasoning entails that there is a normative reason for Caligula to harm innocents. Williams appears to have found this consequence of his theory plausible, and indeed attractive.[25] I join many philosophers in finding it deeply implausible.[26] If there is a way to keep the attractive insights that the Reasoning View offers while also maintaining SQUEAMISHNESS, I would like to find it.

The second class of implausible consequences REASONING VIEW produces has not yet been pointed out in the literature. It involves a class of consequences Williams himself intended his version of the theory not to produce, and that many leading Subjectivist theories are designed to avoid. The case that I will use to demonstrate this class of consequences is an adapted version of a Williams' widely discussed "gin and petrol" case.[27]

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counterexample. McHugh and Way to add a "fittingness" condition on the pro-attitudes that can function in reason-generating pieces of instrumental reasoning. Morally objectionable pro-attitudes are ruled out at as not fitting. This approach works in cases where Caligula reasons from a desire to harm innocents to a certain means (since the premise attitude is not fitting). But it does not seem to work in the case of Caligula described above, as none of the premise-states fail to be fitting. For analogous reasons it is hard to see how this approach could generalize to the case of PRUDENCE that I describe below.

[25] In (Williams 1981b). For related thoughts see (Williams 1982).

[26] Similarly squeamish philosophers include (Korsgaard 1986; Smith 1994; Markovits 2014; McHugh and Way 2016a). One central motivation for SQUEAMISHNESS is the idea, shared by both Kantians and metaethical non-cognitivists, that when I judge that there is a normative reason for someone to ϕ, I am, in a way, endorsing their ϕ-ing (though I may more strongly endorse their not ϕ-ing). SQUEAMISHNESS is thus a principle for those too squeamish to endorse Caligula's harming innocents. For this motivation, see, e.g., (Gibbard 1990, 22, 160ff; Gibbard 1999, 145ff; Gibbard 2003, 188ff; M. E. Bratman 2009, 414–415). A second motivation, discussed briefly below, concerns the difficulty of ensuring that in the relevant set of cases the balance of reasons favors not harming innocents, if one admits that there is some reason for Caligula to do so. See (Schroeder 2007, ch. 7).

[27] Compare (Williams 1981a, 102–103). Note that Scotch is more similar in color to gasoline than gin is.

GASOLINE   You order a glass of Scotch at the bar. The bartender serves you a glass, and you believe the glass is full of Scotch. Actually, it contains only gasoline.

Assume drinking the gasoline will make you violently ill, you are very strongly motivated not to drink gasoline, and so on.

Even Williams, who was not squeamish about morality, was squeamish about this case. He and many others have held not only that you ought not drink the gasoline, but also the following stronger verdict:

PRUDENCE   There is no normative reason for you to drink the gasoline.[28]

As Williams says about the subject of this case, "it is just very odd to say that he has a reason to drink this stuff, and natural to say that he has no reason to drink it, although he thinks he has."[29] Here Williams voices an idea common to many theories of reasons, both Subjectivist and Objectivist: not *every* one of your desires gives rise to a normative reason. There is no reason at all for you to drink the gasoline, and (to use an example of Mark Schroeder's) there is no reason for you to grind up and consume your car, even though doing so would satisfy your desire to increase the iron in your diet.[30] As I discuss in Section 3 below, respecting this commitment has

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[28] PRUDENCE is compatible with the idea that there may be some cases in which you do have a reason to drink the liquid, for example, if a villain threatens your family unless you drink it. Note also that I assume that if there is a normative reason for you to perform an action under some description then there is a normative reason for you to perform that action under any description. It follows that it cannot be the case that there is a normative reason for you to drink *that liquid* but not for you to drink *the gasoline*.

[29] (Williams 1981a, 102). Williams described theories that reject PRUDENCE as "sub-humean."

[30] See (Schroeder 2007, pp. 95-97). Schroeder, however, ultimately rejects verdicts like PRUDENCE and holds that there is a reason for you to consume your car. I discuss his view briefly below.

shaped many Subjectivist theories of reasons.[31] And related ideas have played a role in many influential arguments against Subjectivism.[32]

What does REASONING VIEW say about PRUDENCE? Implicit in Williams' discussion of this case is an argument for the claim that REASONING VIEW generates PRUDENCE because of the Soundness Condition.[33] The argument goes as follows. Normative reasons are the contents of premises thoughts in sound transitions of thought—that is, ones that involve no false beliefs. Any transition of thought involving your false belief that the liquid is Scotch will thus be disqualified from "generating" a normative reason for you to act. Since any piece of good reasoning that could bring you to the decision to drink the liquid will rely on your false belief that the liquid is Scotch, all such pieces of reasoning are disqualified, and so there is no normative reason for you to drink the Scotch.

This argument is unsound. It is false that any possible piece of good reasoning that could bring you to the intention to drink the liquid will rely on your false belief that the liquid is Scotch. Given the assumption that instrumental reasoning is good reasoning, there are possible pieces of sound reasoning that could bring you to intend to drink the liquid. What the Williams-like argument I just described overlooks is that, plausibly, some of your ends other than your desire to drink Scotch could be satisfied by your drinking the gasoline. For example, you might have a strong aftertaste of garlic in your mouth, desire to rid yourself of that aftertaste, and have a true belief that drinking the liquid will rid you of that aftertaste. Or you might desire to appear sophisticated, and have a true belief that sipping the liquid will make you appear sophisticated. (Suppose that it will take you long enough to realize what's going on that you will—for a

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[31] Especially those in the spirit of (Smith 2004; Smith 1994; Railton 1986; Rosati 1996; Sobel 1994).

[32] E.g., (Quinn 1993; Scanlon 1998, ch. 1).

[33] See (Williams 1981a, 102–103).

moment—appear sophisticated to anyone looking at you.)[34] In those cases, instrumental reasoning can bring you to the intention to drink the liquid in front of you, and the relevant pieces of instrumental reasoning will involve no false beliefs. It thus follows from REASONING VIEW that there is a normative reason for you to drink the liquid.

How concerned should proponents of the Reasoning View be by this argument? Both SQUEAMISHNESS and PRUDENCE are controversial, so not all philosophers will find the conclusion of this argument worrying. A notable example of a philosopher who rejects PRUDENCE is Schroeder. Schroeder admits that rejecting PRUDENCE is counterintuitive, but holds that this is not evidence in PRUDENCE's favor. He argues that intuitions about "negative existential" normative judgments (judgments that there is not a normative reason for someone to act in a certain way) are systematically misleading.[35] Schroeder is thus willing to admit the existence of a wide range of counterintuitive reasons, including the reason to consume your car. Discussing that argument is beyond the scope of this paper, but I join those philosophers who are not convinced by it.[36] Even setting aside the question of whether rejecting SQUEAMISHNESS and PRUDENCE is counterintuitive, Schroeder himself admits that once a theory admits the existence of such reasons, it takes on the further burden of explaining why such reasons are systematically of very low weight, and so are systematically outweighed by other reasons. Discharging that burden has been shown to be very difficult.[37] My view is that it would be better

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[34] Objection: what if you wouldn't *desire to appear sophisticated by drinking gasoline*? Reply: it is possible to desire to appear sophisticated, full stop, without desiring to appear sophisticated by drinking gasoline. On this point, see (Fara 2013). Fara's idea is that desire reports are defeasible in sense very much like that described in Part 4 below.

[35] See, e.g., (Schroeder 2007, 93–94)

[36] Very briefly: Schroeder's argument relies on intuitive judgments about the doxastic justification of certain beliefs in arbitrarily complicated "Tom Grabit"-style cases (discussed in section 5 below). I do not share his intuitive judgments about those cases.

[37] This is one of the central projects in (Schroeder 2007). For arguments that Schroeder's version of this project faces serious problems, see (Shackel 2014; McPherson 2010). Compare also (Lin 2015).

to head the problem off at the pass, by altering the Reasoning View so as to render it compatible with SQUEAMISHNESS and PRUDENCE in the first place, if possible. I turn to that project now.

3. The Idealization Strategy

The Overgeneration Problem is familiar from discussions of Subjectivism about normative reasons, and some Subjectivists have found ways to avoid analogous problems. In this section I show that the strategy many Subjectivists employed in this context, which involves appealing to a kind of idealization, cannot by employed to help the Reasoning View.

Begin by considering a simple Subjectivist theory in the spirit of Michael Smith's.

SUBJECTIVISM   There is a normative reason for A to φ just in case, if A were fully
                        rational and fully informed, A would desire that the actual A φs.[38]

According to this version of Subjectivism, what there is normative reason for A to do depends not on what A actually desires, but on A's idealized desires.

The idealization in this kind of Subjectivist is intended to solve an analogue of the Overgeneration Problem. Subjectivists who wish to vindicate SQUEAMISHNESS do so by conjoining SUBJECTIVISM with a kind of rationalism about morality, according to which a fully rational agent never desires that her actual counterpart perform actions that violate moral requirements.[39] An idealized Caligula would not desire that the actual Caligula harms innocents,

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[38] See (Smith 2004; Smith 1994). Compare. also (Railton 1986; Rosati 1996; Sobel 1994).
[39] See, e.g., (Smith 2004; Smith 1994; Markovits 2014). Cf. also (Korsgaard 1996). Note that Setiya is a proponent of the Reasoning View who accepts something like this kind of rationalism about morality (see (Setiya 2007)).

so there is not a normative reason for the actual Caligula to harm innocents. The kind of rationalism about morality that this strategy requires is highly controversial, but it is straightforward to see how it enables SUBJECTIVISM to generate SQUEAMISHNESS.

It is also straightforward to see how SUBJECTIVISM generates PRUDENCE. Since I stipulated that the rest of your psychology includes strong motivations not to drink the gasoline, it is plausible that your fully idealized counterpart would not desire that you drink the gasoline. So there is no reason for you to drink it.

Can implementing this strategy help the Reasoning View? Implementing this strategy would involve holding that the practical standpoint relevant to an agent's reasons is not her actual one but an idealized one. The only pro-attitudes that would generate reasons, on this view, would be the ones that one would have if one were idealized.[40]

Unfortunately, even if rationalism about morality is granted, this strategy does not solve the Overgeneration Problem for the Reasoning View. The elements of your practical standpoint that generate the problematic reasons in CALIGULA and GASOLINE are elements that would survive any idealization it would be plausible to use in this context. The desires that generated the problematic reasons were Caligula's desire for pleasure, and your desires to rid yourself of the aftertaste of garlic and to appear sophisticated. Crucially, those desires are ones that would survive a Smith-like idealization. Caligula's desire for pleasure and your desires to rid yourself of the garlic aftertaste and to appear sophisticated are not based on false beliefs, are not desires to do things that are always morally forbidden, and do not obviously stand in rational conflict with

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[40] Compare Williams' claim that desires whose existence in your psychology is counterfactually dependent on your having a false belief be ruled out. See (Williams 1981a, 103).

the rest of your psychology.[41] Even in a theory that incorporates a Smith-like idealization, those desires would continue to generate the problematic normative reasons.

I thus suspect that altering how the Reasoning View conceives of the agent's practical standpoint is barking up the wrong tree. Solving the problem will require looking elsewhere.

4. The Defeasibility Strategy

The natural next place to look is in our conception of the norms of practical reasoning. In this section, I argue that the norms of practical reasoning are characteristically defeasible. The relevant idea of defeasibility is familiar to epistemologists and philosophical logicians, but it has rarely been discussed in the context of practical reasoning.[42] I give a precise characterization of the property of defeasibility and provide four reasons to believe that the norms of practical reasoning have this property. I then argue that this idea makes room for the construction of a version of the Reasoning View that validates both SQUEAMISHNESS and PRUDENCE.[43]

4.1 The Norms of Practical Reasoning Are Defeasible

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[41] Note that you might continue to have these desires after learning that the liquid is gasoline.

[42] One exception is the work of John Horty, as in (Horty 2007; Horty 2012). Horty's theory of normative reasons appeals to tools from non-monotonic logic. Strikingly, on his view the fundamental reason relation is not defeasible in precisely my sense. A second exception is (Way, 2015), where Way attempts to use the idea of defeasible reasoning to explain how proponents of the Reasoning View should conceive of outweighed pro tanto reasons. I discuss my disagreement with Way below. Two formal treatments of defeasible practical reasoning are (Governatori and Rotolo 2004; Pollock 1995).

[43] Those impressed with the account of the defeasibility of desire-reports given in (Fara 2013) and with related work about the so-called "implicit conditionality" of intention (such as (M. Bratman 1979; Ferrero 2009; Gillessen 2015) may agree with me that what causes the Overgeneration Problem is a kind of defeasibility, but may worry that I am locating the defeasibility in the wrong place. Perhaps what is defeasible is (in some sense) our pro-attitudes themselves, and not the norms of reasoning. My reply to such philosophers is just that I do not now know how to exploit the defeasibility of our pro-attitudes in order to solve the Overgeneration Problem but I do know how to exploit the defeasibility of practical reasoning to do so.

The idea of defeasible norms of reasoning is familiar from discussions of theoretical reasoning. It is widely believed that if logical consequence were our only guide to inference, our inferential knowledge would be limited. In part on this ground, it is now widely thought that the norms of theoretical reasoning endorse some non-deductive patterns of reasoning, including plausibly various forms of induction, inference to the best explanation, and statistical inference.[44]

Non-deductive reasoning patterns are defeasible in a distinctive sense: they are not robust to new information. Sometimes learning new information—even information consistent with all of your old information—can require you to revise the conclusions you drew from your original belief set. In an induction of the form that Carnap called "universal inference,"[45] for example, one infers the belief that a generalization obtains (e.g., "all swans are white") from several beliefs concerning instances of the generalization (e.g., "this swan is white," etc). Famously, however, universal inference is not robust to future learning. If you were to add certain new beliefs to your premise set (as when you observe a black swan), you would be required to withdraw your belief that the universal generalization obtains.

By contrast, deductive reasoning is often thought to be indefeasible.[46] The logical consequence relation is monotonic: when a conclusion is a logical consequence of a set of premises, it is also a logical consequence of any strengthening of that premise set (that is, any set of premises that contains the original premise set).[47] This means that if you form new beliefs

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[44] The classic contemporary sources for this idea the work of and John Pollock (e.g., (Pollock 1974; Pollock and Cruz 1999; Pollock 1987)) and Gilbert Herman (especially (Harman 1986; Harman 2001)), though the ideas are much older (as in, e.g., (Carnap 1950)) and have earlier sources in the history of philosophy. Compare also (Davidson 1980; Thomson 1965).

[45] (Carnap 1950, 207ff). See also (Vickers, 2014, sec. 3).

[46] This is somewhat controversial. Epistemologists who are conciliatory about higher-order evidence may hold that, even though logical consequence is monotonic, the norms of theoretical reasoning that track logical consequence are defeasible. On this question, see, e.g., (Christensen 2010; Kelly 2010; Lasonen-Aarnio 2014).

[47] The consequence functions (if such there be) associated with non-deductive patterns of reasoning such as induction and abduction are consequence non-monotonic, and so such patterns of reasoning are defeasible. Whether

without giving up any old ones, everything that was a logical consequence of (the contents of) your old belief set is also a logical consequence of (the contents of) your new belief set. So purely deductive reasoning is robust to new information.

We can define defeasibility more carefully as follows:

DEFEASIBILITY   A set of reasoning norms is defeasible just in case it endorses the transition from some set of possible premise states, P, to a possible conclusion state, C, even though it does not endorse the transition from some strengthening of P to C.

For reasoners who obey defeasible norms of reasoning, sometimes learning more information (without losing any information) will leave them in a position to make fewer inferences. This is so even when the newly added belief is logically consistent with all of the other premise beliefs (as in the universal inference displayed above), and when it is logically consistent with the conclusion.[48]

Are the norms of practical reasoning defeasible? Four types of considerations support the idea that they are.[49] The first is simply the analogy with theoretical reasoning. It would be strange if the norms of theoretical reasoning were defeasible and the norms of practical reasoning were not. This would seem particularly strange if it is true that some transitions of thought that

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non-deductive patterns of reasoning can be characterized by consequence functions strictly construed is part of the subject matter of the study of non-monotonic logics. For an overview, see (Horty 2012).

[48] The classic example of this latter phenomenon in non-monotonic logic involves an agent who infers, from the premise that Tweety is a bird, the conclusion that Tweety can fly. The new information that Tweety is a penguin would ruin that inference, though it is logically consistent with the conclusion. Compare (Pollock 1987; Horty 2001).

[49] Here I am in agreement with Horty and Way; see, e.g., (Horty 2012; Way, 2015)

count, in their entirety, as pieces of practical reasoning include pieces of theoretical reasoning. In that case, practical reasoning might inherit defeasibility from theoretical reasoning.

The second source of support stems from reflection on the idea of undercutting relations among reasons, and an analogy with reasons for belief. In epistemology, putative normative reasons for belief are often thought to be able to stand in a variety of relationships. If A testifies that *p* and B testifies that ~*p*, their testimony provides you with conflicting *pro tanto* reasons for belief, which weigh against each other. If B instead testifies that *A doesn't know whether p*, B's testimony plays a different role. Instead of weighing against the reason given by A's testimony, it undercuts it. Such relations of undercutting defeat are widely thought to be a symptom of a kind of defeasibility in the epistemic support relation that mirrors the defeasibility of theoretical reasoning.[50]

The existence of analogous relations among putative practical reasons would thus be evidence for the defeasibility of the norms of practical reasoning. And it is plausible that such relations exist.[51] John McDowell, for example, has argued that moral requirements characteristically function as undercutters. The fact that you want to do something is typically a reason to do it, but the fact that doing it would be morally forbidden (McDowell claims) undercuts or "silences" that reason.[52] Given that the action is morally forbidden, your desire gives you no reason at all to perform the action. Joseph Raz has argued that promises and other interpersonal commitments at least sometimes give rise to what he calls "second-order reasons," which plausibly function as undercutters.[53] If there are undercutting relations among putative normative reasons, then a treatment of this phenomenon parallel to the way it is often treated in

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[50] See, e.g., (Pollock 1987; Pollock and Cruz 1999; Harman 2001, pt. 1).

[51] Though this idea is controversial. For a defense of it, see (Cullity 2013).

[52] See (McDowell 2001b; Seidman 2005; McDowell 2001a, 81; McDowell 1979)

[53] On Raz's view, see (Raz 1985).

epistemology would highlight the role of some kind of defeasible support relation. Since according to the Reasoning View, facts about normative reasons are grounded in facts about the norms of practical reasoning, this kind of phenomenon lends support to the idea that the norms of practical reasoning are defeasible.

A third source of support comes from the observation that good practical reasoning can sometimes bring an agent to violate a synchronic requirement of rationality.[54] Imagine a version of Caligula who, in addition to believing that harming innocents will bring him pleasure, believes that harming innocents is wrong. I assumed above that the norms of reasoning endorse the transition from Caligula's desire for pleasure and means-ends belief to his intention that he harm innocents. It seems plausible, however, that the norms of practical reasoning do not endorse the transition from Caligula's desire and means-ends belief, as well as his belief that harming innocents is wrong, to the intention to harm innocents. It is not good reasoning to knowingly bring oneself to be akratic.[55] If that's right, then this is a case in which the norms of practical reasoning endorse the transition from a premise set to a conclusion without endorsing the transition from a strengthened premise set to the same conclusion. So the norms of practical reasoning are defeasible.

The final source of support for the idea that the norms of practical reasoning are defeasible is simply that it provides what seems to me to be an intuitive way to understand the GASOLINE case.[56] In this case, you desire to appear sophisticated, and you have a true belief that drinking the liquid will make you appear sophisticated. The norms of practical reasoning endorse the transition from those states to an intention to drink the liquid, and so according to the

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[54] That this sometimes happens is compatible with Broome's influential idea that a key function of reasoning is to help us satisfy synchronic requirements of rationality (see (Broome 2013, chap. 10)).

[55] A similar example is discussed in (McHugh and Way 2016b).

[56] I realize that this point will not persuade those who prefer a different solution to the Overgeneration Problem or who are inclined to reject SQUEAMISHNESS and PRUDENCE.

Reasoning View there is a reason for you to drink the liquid. It seems to me, however, that there is a strengthened set of possible premise states—including the belief that the liquid is gasoline—from which it would *not* be good reasoning to form the intention to drink the liquid. Intending to drink the liquid on the basis of your desire to appear sophisticated, given that you believed the liquid was gasoline, would be like forming the belief that all swans are white on the basis of your beliefs that there are many white swans and your belief that there is a black swan.

4.2 How to Solve the Overgeneration Problem

I have not given a conclusive argument for the claim that the norms of practical reasoning are defeasible, but I hope I have made the idea seem plausible. I will now explain how this idea allows us to modify the Reasoning View so as to solve the Overgeneration Problem.

The central idea is a distinction between sound pieces of reasoning that are defeated and sound pieces of reasoning that are undefeated.[57] Intuitively, the universal inference described above is undefeated in situations when there are no black swans, and defeated in the actual world right now (by the fact that there exist black swans). More carefully, a sound piece of reasoning is defeated just in case there is a fact such that the norms of reasoning do not endorse the transition from the relevant premise set, strengthened to include a belief in that fact, to the same conclusion. That fact is the defeater for that piece of reasoning.

The Reasoning View can thus respond to the Overgeneration Problem by holding that only sound *and undefeated* pieces of reasoning generate normative reasons. Only those

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[57] Here I follow Pollock, in, e.g., (Pollock 1987).

transitions of thought that are robust to new information generate normative reasons.[58] This

solution to the Overgeneration Problem requires making a modification to the Reasoning View,

as follows:

REASONING VIEW* A normative reason for A to φ is a set of facts, F, such that the norms of practical reasoning endorse the transition from a set including beliefs with those facts as their contents and (optionally) one or more elements of A's practical standpoint, to A's intention that A φ, and there are no defeaters for that transition.[59]

I can also make the idea of a defeater more precise. Where R is a transition of thought endorsed

by the norms of reasoning,

DEFEATER A fact, F, is a defeater for R, just in case the norms of practical reasoning do not endorse R+, which is R enlarged to include a belief in F as an additional premise state.

The crucial idea here is that there is information—a fact—such that, if you learned it, you would

be required to withdraw the relevant conclusion. Only pieces of reasoning for which there are no

such defeating facts generate normative reasons. Note that the relevant fact may be complex,

such as the fact *that the liquid is gasoline, drinking gasoline will make you violently ill, and*

becoming ill on such an occasion will frustrate some of your deepest desires.[60]

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[58] As I will discuss in Part 5 below, this idea has important similarities to so-called defeasibility theories of knowledge. See, e.g., (Klein 1976; Klein 1981; Klein 1980). Note also that here I am in disagreement with Way, who associates defeated pieces of reasoning with outweighed pro tanto reasons, in (Way, 2015). I discuss outweighed pro tanto reasons briefly below.

[59] Note whether a particular transition of thought is defeated at *t* and world w depends on how *w* is at time *t*—what the facts are then and there. I suppress this relativization throughout.

[60] The move from REASONING VIEW to REASONING VIEW* may be one place where the Reasoning View's treatment of reasons for action and reasons for belief will come apart. Many epistemologists hold that there are normative reasons for belief which are not robust to new information. In my view, this as a deep difference between the common concepts of a normative reason for action and a normative reason for belief. Another difference may be

Solving the Overgeneration Problem using this strategy requires developing a theory of defeaters that entails that in CALIGULA and GASOLINE there are defeaters for the relevant pieces of reasoning. A full theory of defeat is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, what I will do here is provide a design specification for such a theory. I highlight two categories of facts that plausibly do count as defeaters for instrumental reasoning, and which would allow the Reasoning View to produce PRUDENCE and SQUEAMISHNESS. I thus show that there is logical space for a version of the Reasoning View that produces those consequences, and what such a theory might look like.

The first category of facts has to do with an agent's especially strong or especially deeply held volitional commitments.[61] Plausibly, the fact that pursuing a certain action would conflict with one of an agent's most deeply held commitments is a defeater for otherwise sound pieces of instrumental reasoning. If satisfying your desire in a certain way would conflict with one of your most deeply held commitments, a piece of practical reasoning beginning with that desire does not generate a normative reason to perform that action. This is my diagnosis of GASOLINE: the fact that drinking the gasoline would frustrate your deeply held commitment to self-preservation defeats the relevant piece of reasoning. Indeed, it is often observed that one characteristic functional role of such commitments is that they tend to inhibit agents from engaging in such pieces of reasoning: someone deeply committed to not poisoning herself will typically not even consider courses of action that would involve poisoning herself.[62] Note that this idea is consistent

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whether to accept the Soundness Condition; many epistemologists hold that false beliefs can count as normative reasons for belief (though that is controversial—see, e.g., (Williamson 2000, chap. 9)).

[61] These might include: one's self-governing policies, one's cares, and one's normative judgments (construed as a kind of pro-attitude). Many of these ideas stem from the essays in (Frankfurt 1988). An overview of this literature can be found (M. E. Bratman 2007).

[62] Compare (M. E. Bratman 1999, 213).

with the idea that such volitional commitments do not defeat all forms of reasoning. One might hold, for example, that they do not systematically defeat reasoning about moral requirements.[63]

These reflections on moral requirements lead to the second category of facts that I think are plausibly defeaters for instrumental reasoning, which will explain how the Reasoning View can vindicate SQUEAMISHNESS. This category is certain facts about moral requirements. I think it is plausible that the fact that an action is morally forbidden can defeat a piece of sound instrumental reasoning. Like McDowell, I think the norms of practical reasoning endorse pieces of instrumental reasoning that can lead you to decide to satisfy your desires, and so in general desires provide us with normative reasons for action.[64] But when the available means to satisfying your desire is morally forbidden, the desire does not give you any reason at all to take those means. The fact that the action is morally forbidden defeats that piece of instrumental reasoning. While the norms of reasoning endorse the transition from Caligula's desire to have pleasure and his belief that harming innocents will bring him pleasure to the intention that he perform that violent act, the fact that the violent act is morally forbidden is a defeater for that piece of reasoning. The Reasoning View thus entails SQUEAMISHNESS.[65]

One qualifying remark is important here. An adequate theory of defeaters must hold that not all normative facts function as defeaters for instrumental reasoning. In particular, it must hold that the fact that *you ought not to* ϕ does not function as a defeater for every piece of instrumental reasoning that concludes in an intention to ϕ, and it must hold that the fact that *you*

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[63] This would explain why there are normative reasons for Caligula to respect his victims, despite his deeply held desire for pleasure and true belief that harming innocents will bring him pleasure.

[64] Compare (McDowell 2001b; Seidman 2005; McDowell 2001a, 81; McDowell 1979).

[65] Note that I claim here that facts about moral prohibitions defeat instrumental reasoning. It is open to the Reasoning View to hold that facts about moral prohibitions do not defeat all kinds of reasoning, such as reasoning from beliefs about prudential values. On the distinction between moral requirements and less stringent moral considerations see (Harman 2016).

have a stronger normative reason to ψ than to φ does not function as a defeater either.[66] If facts

of either of these types were defeaters, then the Reasoning View would rule out the possibility of

outweighed pro tanto reasons—that is, reasons to φ that continue to exist in the face of reasons to

ψ (where ψ-ing and φ-ing are not co-possible). One plausible way to ensure this result would be

to hold that the normative facts that function as defeaters are facts of an especially stringent

deontic status. These might include facts about what is morally forbidden (where that is more

stringent than saying simply that the action is morally bad, or that morally you ought not to do

it), or facts about what you must do it (where *must* is a more stringent deontic modal than

ought).[67]

To sum up, the view is as follows. The central idea is that the norms of practical

reasoning are characteristically defeasible. This allows us to distinguish between sound

transitions of thought that are defeated and those that are undefeated. I described a design

specification for a theory of the norms of practical reasoning that would allow the Reasoning

View to explain why in CALIGULA and PRUDENCE, the sound transitions of thought that

produce the offending reasons are plausibly defeated. Ruling out such defeated transitions of

thought promises to allow the Reasoning View to vindicate both SQUEAMISHNESS and

PRUDENCE. Of course, to be made plausible the Reasoning View must make good on this

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[66] In the former case, I assume that if you have a stronger normative reason to φ than to perform any other alternative to φ-ing, ψ, then you ought to φ and you ought not to ψ (for each ψ). Rejecting that principle, which is somewhat controversial, would potentially allow ought facts to serve as defeaters. For discussion of related issues, see (Snedegar, 2016). Facts about the balance of reasons cannot serve as undercutters on pain of introducing circularity into the definitions of normative reason and defeater.

[67] On *must*, compare (Snedegar, 2016). How does this version of the Reasoning View explain the existence of outweighed pro tanto reasons? Here I follow what I take to be Williams' view (in (Williams 1981a, 104)). On this view, endorsement by the norms of reasoning comes in degrees: there is better and worse reasoning. (Cf. (Hempel 1970, 394ff; Davidson 1980, 40) An outweighed pro tanto reason to φ is one associated with a sound and undefeated piece of reasoning that is weaker than some sound and undefeated piece of reasoning that concludes in a intention to perform an action that is not co-possible with φ-ing. This approach differs from that of (Way, 2015), who associates outweighed reasons with defeated pieces of reasoning, and of (Setiya 2007, chap. 1).

promise and provide a theory of the norms of practical reasoning that satisfies this design specification. What it shows, however, is that the failure of the Idealization Strategy does not show that the prospects for the Reasoning View are hopeless.

5. Misleading Defeaters

The theory that results from this modification is similar in an important way to the so-called Defeasibility Theory of Knowledge (or DTK). Both theories make use of the idea of indefeasibility as robustness to new information; according to a rough version of DTK, knowledge is true belief whose justification is indefeasible in that sense.[68] This similarity may lead one to wonder whether REASONING VIEW* is subject to the most widely-discussed problem facing DTK, which is the problem of so-called "misleading defeaters." In this final section of the paper, I suggest that solving this problem is substantially easier for the Reasoning View than for DTK.

DTK is, roughly, the view that an agent knows that p when she has a justified, true belief that p, and her justification can survive her learning any new facts (that is, acquiring any new true beliefs).[69] The objection I am concerned with concerns cases in which intuitively an agent knows a true proposition even though there are misleading facts that, if she came to believe them, would apparently defeat her justification. These have typically been called cases of "misleading defeaters."[70]

An example of such a case is as follows.[71]

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[68] On DTK, see, e.g., (Levy 1978; Klein 1979; Klein 1980; Klein 1981; de Almeida and Fett, 2016).

[69] Here I follow (de Almeida and Fett, 2016)

[70] See (Lehrer and Paxson Jr. 1969). The term "misleading defeaters" comes from (Levy 1978; Klein 1979; Klein 1980; Klein 1981).

[71] This case is adapted from (Lehrer and Paxson Jr. 1969). See also (Harman 1973, chap. 9)

GRABIT	You see Tom Grabit steal a book from the library. Unbeknownst to you, on another continent, Tom's mother has just falsely asserted that Tom has an identical twin brother. In fact, he does not.

Lehrer and Paxson claim that, intuitively:

KNOWLEDGE	You know that Tom stole the book.

Lehrer and Paxson argue that DTK is inconsistent with KNOWLEDGE. If you came to have the (false) belief that Tom's mother has just asserted that Tom has an identical twin brother, your justification for believing that Tom stole the book would be reduced and your belief would no longer count as knowledge.

Does an analogous problem arise for REASONING VIEW*? Here is an analogous case concerning normative reasons for action.

SCOTCH LIE	You order Scotch at the bar and are served a glass of Scotch. Unbeknownst to you, on another continent, someone has just falsely asserted: "The bartender put poison in that glass of Scotch!" (referring to your glass). In fact, the glass contains only Scotch.

I accept the following:

SCOTCH	There is a normative reason for you to drink the Scotch.

Can REASONING VIEW* return SCOTCH, or is the fact that someone far away asserted that the Scotch was poisoned a defeater for the pieces of ordinary instrumental reasoning that could bring you to drink?

I think there are two plausible responses to be made here. The first, flat-footed response is to hold that the stranger's testimony is not a defeater for the relevant piece of reasoning. This would be to insist that the norms of practical reasoning endorse the transition from your desire to drink Scotch and your true means-ends belief, along with a belief about the stranger's testimony, to the intention to drink the Scotch. The norms do not endorse the transition from your desire and means-ends belief, along with a belief that the liquid is poisoned, to an intention to drink—but *that the liquid is poisoned* is false, and so it does not count as a defeater.

There are two sources of support for this flat-footed response. One is intuitive: while I have a strong intuition that the fact that the liquid is gasoline defeats your instrumental reasoning in GASOLINE, I do not have a similar intuition in this case. It may be perfectly acceptable for you to reason this way in SCOTCH LIE.[72] The second source concerns the difference in mechanisms of defeat appealed to by DTK and the Reasoning View. For the Reasoning View, a defeater is a fact that can ruin an otherwise sound transition of thought. For DTK, a defeater is a fact that would defeat your justification for having a belief, if you were to come to believe it. Plausibly, however, not all DTK-defeaters are Reasoning View-defeaters. Your epistemic status in the counterfactual scenario specified by DTK's definition of defeat is not obviously relevant to the question of which transitions of thought are endorsed by the norms of practical reasoning. Suppose that in the nearest possible world in which you learn about the stranger's testimony, your degree of justification for believing that the liquid is Scotch decreases to the point that it

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[72] By contrast, if you came to believe that someone had asserted that your drink was poisoned, and on that basis you inferred the additional (false) belief that it was poisoned, that belief might make it bad reasoning for you to form the intention to drink the liquid. But that belief is not a defeater, in my sense, as it is false.

would no longer count as knowledge. It might nonetheless be the case that the norms of practical reasoning endorse the transition from your belief that the liquid is Scotch and your desire to drink some Scotch, along with a belief about the stranger's testimony, to an intention to drink the liquid. Plausibly, the norms of practical reasoning are indifferent to your actual and counterfactual epistemic status.[73]

There is also a less flat-footed response to this objection available. As Peter Klein has emphasized, what makes a misleading defeater *misleading* is that its defeat of the relevant piece of reasoning is itself not robust to new information. There are further facts that could rehabilitate the defeated piece of reasoning. In the case of SCOTCH LIE, this might simply be the fact that the Scotch has not been poisoned. Klein (following Albert Blumberg) refers to these further facts as "defeater-eaters."[74]

That fact that necessarily each misleading defeater is paired with a "defeater-eater" allows us to generate a definition of misleading defeaters that lets us solve the problem. The key idea is that a misleading defeater is one whose status as a defeater is not itself robust to new information. Let R be a transition of thought endorsed by the norms of practical reasoning. Then:

DEFEATER* A fact, F, is a defeater for R, just in case:
(a) The norms of practical reasoning do not endorse R+, which is R enlarged to include a belief in F as an additional premise, and
(b) There is no further fact, G, such that the norms of practical reasoning do endorse R++, which is R+ enlarged to include a belief in G as an additional premise.

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[73] Here I am in agreement with (McHugh and Way 2016a). It may well be that there is some other norm enjoining us to reason only with and act only on our justified beliefs or our knowledge (which is the view of (Hawthorne and Stanley 2008)). For discussion, see (Brown 2008).
[74] (Klein 1980, 88)

According to DEFEATER*, misleading defeaters are not genuine defeaters at all.

Opponents of DTK have argued against similar moves on the grounds that there could be cases of defeater-eater-eaters, in which the agent's justification for believing that the defeater-eater obtains could be defeated by further (misleading) information.[75] This problem does not arise for REASONING VIEW*. The advantage REASONING VIEW* over DTK is that REASONING VIEW* does not require that there be no further information such that, in the nearby worlds where the agent learns that information her justification for certain beliefs is defeated. It only requires that the norms of practical reasoning continue to endorse the relevant transition of thought in those worlds. And, as far as I can tell, once a piece of reasoning includes a defeater-eater such as *that the Scotch is not poisoned*, the practical inference will go through. This is so even if the inference is enlarged to contain further beliefs about instances of misleading testimony. A full defense of DEFEATER* may require further qualification, but I am optimistic that this strategy can be made to work.[76]

Conclusion

I have argued that existing versions of the Reasoning View are subject to an overlooked problem, the Overgeneration Problem, which renders the Reasoning View liable to counterexamples familiar from discussions of Subjectivist theories of normative reasons. I argued that this problem is distinctive, as the main strategy Subjectivists have used to respond to the analogous challenge does not help the Reasoning View. In my view, the source of this

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[75] For an overview, see (de Almeida and Fett, 2016).

[76] One such qualification is that, plausibly, we will have to ensure that the defeater-eater (G) must not itself be a normative reason for the agent to ϕ. Otherwise, whenever there are two different sound pieces of reasoning that could bring the agent to the same conclusion, it will be impossible for one of those pieces of reasoning to be defeated, since the premises of the other piece of reasoning would otherwise play the G-role.

problem lies in how proponents of the Reasoning View have conceived of the norms of practical reasoning. I claimed it is plausible that the norms of practical reasoning are defeasible, in a sense familiar from discussions of theoretical reasoning. And I argued that this idea makes space for a solution to the Overgeneration Problem. The resulting version of the Reasoning View is analogous to familiar Defeasibility Theories of Knowledge, but its associated theory of defeat makes it easier to defend.[77]

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