

The Use of Reasons in Thought (and the use of earmarks in arguments)

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Here I defend my solution to the wrong kind of reason problem against Mark Schroeder's criticisms. In doing so, I highlight an important difference between other accounts of reasons and my own. While others understand reasons as considerations that count in favor of attitudes, I understand reasons as considerations that bear (or are taken to bear) on questions. Thus, to relate reasons to attitudes, on my account, we must consider the relation between attitudes and questions. By considering that relation, we not only solve the wrong kind of reason problem, but we also bring into view rational agency—the use of reasons in thought.

The wrong-kind-of-reason problem arose as philosophers noticed that certain considerations count in favor of certain attitudes while also seeming to be reasons of the wrong kind. The distinction between “epistemic” and “pragmatic” reasons for belief provides a paradigm, but the same distinction seems to appear across a range of attitudes. How, then, to characterize this difference in general terms? It was suggested by Christian Piller and Derek Parfit that the right kind of reasons for an attitude concern the content, or object, of the attitude—they are “object-given” (or “content-related”)—while the wrong kind concern the attitude or psychological state, itself—they are “state-given” (or “attitude-related”).¹ These labels were thus aligned with an intuitive difference that seems to appear across a range of attitudes. However, neither the labels nor the accounts given of them provided a clear, principled way to draw the distinction.

The problem became acute when certain philosophers hoped to give a “fitting-attitudes” analysis of value—to claim that to be valuable is to be the fitting object of valuing attitudes.² To provide such an account, one needs a principled, independent way to rule out the wrong kind of reason. (Otherwise, reasons of the wrong kind show the attitude fitting even when its object is not

¹ Christian Piller, “Normative Practical Reasoning,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 75, Supp, no. 1 (2001); Derek Parfit, “Rationality and Reasons,” in *Exploring Practical Philosophy*, ed. Dan Egonsson, et al. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Press, 2001).

²Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson, “Sentiment and Value,” *Ethics* 110(2000).

valuable.)³ Various attempts were made either to draw the required distinction or to modify the fitting-attitudes analysis to avoid the problem.⁴

1. A Solution

I believe I provided a principled way to draw the distinction.⁵ The key to the puzzle (and to many others, it turned out) is to be bothered by the popular claim that “a reason is a consideration that counts in favor of an action or attitude.”⁶ While I agree that a reason is a *consideration* standing in a *relation*, this popular formulation uses, as the fundamental relation in which a consideration becomes a reason, a relation to an *action or attitude*—specifically, the relation of *counting in favor of* that action or attitude.

To understand a reason in this way is already to take a step towards thinking that reasons for attitudes are all state-given: reasons stand, fundamentally, in relation to some piece of psychology. Worse, to understand reasons in this way is to step away from rational agency—from the *use* of reasons in thought.

A reason, I would insist, is an item in (actual or possible) reasoning. Reasoning is (actual or possible) thought directed at some question or conclusion. Thus, reasons must relate, in the first instance, not to states of mind, but to questions or conclusions. If reasons are to be brought into relation with attitudes, they must be so related *via* some question or conclusion.

³ See, e.g., Wlodek Rabinowicz and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen, "The Strike of the Demon: On Fitting Pro-attitudes and Value," *Ethics* 114(2004).

⁴ See, e.g., Jonas Olson, "Buck-Passing and the Wrong Kind of Reasons," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 54, no. 215 (2004)., Philip Stratton-Lake, "How to deal with evil demons: Comments on Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen," *Ethics* 115(2005)., Sven Danielson and Jonas Olson, "Brentano and the Buck-Passers," *Mind* 116(2007)., Gerald Lang, "The right kind of solution to the wrong kind of reason problem," *Utilitas* 20(2008).

Importantly, some *identify* “the wrong-kind-of-reason problem” with the problem for the FA analysis. Schroeder and I instead address the earlier problem: provide a principled way to draw one distinction across a range of attitudes.

⁵Pamela Hieronymi, "The Wrong Kind of Reason," *The Journal of Philosophy* 102, no. 9 (2005).

⁶ T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

Here is one way *attitudes* relate to *questions or conclusions*: when a thinker comes to certain conclusions, or answers certain questions, that thinker *therein* forms, holds, or revises certain attitudes. In concluding that *p*, I believe *p*. In deciding to *x*, I intend to *x*. Certain attitudes happen, one might say, as thinkers answer questions. If the thinker answers the question for a reason, then the attitude therein formed is “based on” that reason, it was “the agent’s reason” for that attitude, her “operative” reason.⁷

Here is a very different way attitudes relate to questions: attitudes sometimes appear in the question being asked. I might ask whether it is good to believe *p*, whether I ought to intend to *x*, why she resents him, or how it came about that he intends to run. The reasons that bear on some of these questions explain the attitude mentioned—how that attitude came about. Reasons that bear on other questions will, instead, show something good, right, valuable, or appropriate about that attitude.

We can now see how the popular formula (“a reason is a consideration that counts in favor of an attitude”) is ambiguous (as is the idea of a “normative” reason). Considerations can “count in favor of” an attitude in two very different ways. First, they can bear positively on a question such as whether *p* or whether to *x*—a question the answering of which amounts to forming the attitude. Alternatively, they can bear positively on the question of whether the attitude is in some way good to have. In the case of a belief that *p*, the first question is whether *p*. Evidence bears on this question. The second question is whether a belief that *p* would be good to have. “Pragmatic” reasons for believing bear on this question.

One might understand the object-/state-given distinction by appeal to these two questions. State-given reasons count in favor of the attitude by bearing on the question of whether the attitude

⁷ The “basing” relation is discussed in epistemology. For “the agent’s reason,” or “operative” or “motivating” reasons see, e.g., *Ibid.*; Donald Davidson, “Actions, Reasons, and Causes,” in *Essays on Actions and Events* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Jonathan Dancy, *Practical Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

is good to have. Object-given reasons count in favor of the attitude by bearing on the question, the settling of which amounts to forming the attitude. This would give the distinction some precision.

However, so understood, the object-/state-given distinction will not align with the distinction between the right and wrong kind of reason.⁸ The right-/wrong-kind distinction must be exclusive, but the object-/state-given distinction, so interpreted, allows overlap: The answer to one of the questions can bear on the other, and so reasons that bear on one question can thereby come to bear on the other. E.g., since it is often good to have true beliefs, considerations that bear on whether p can also, thereby, bear on whether it is good to believe p . Likewise, for certain values of p , considerations that show it good to believe p thereby bear positively on whether p (e.g., “this very belief is good to have”). Considerations that answer, positively, the question of whether to x will typically also show intending to x good, and that I ought to intend to x bears positively on whether to x .

Despite the overlap, we can see how to draw the desired distinction: the right kind of reasons for (or against) an attitude are *any* that bear (or are taken to bear) on a question (or set of questions) the positive settling of which amounts to forming the attitude. The wrong kind of reasons somehow count in favor of (or against) the attitude *without* bearing (or being taken to bear) on that question. They bear (or are taken to bear) *only* on whether the attitude is in some way good to have. (The wrong kind are “purely” state-given, we might say.)

The parenthetical qualifiers, “(or are taken to bear),” just appeared. This is because considerations incorrectly taken to be reasons are still reasons—they are *that person’s* reasons.⁹ The distinction between the right and wrong kind is thus orthogonal to the distinction between good and

⁸ I agree with Schroeder on this point (though my reason for thinking so differs from his).

⁹ The phrase “taken to be a reason” is ambiguous between “believed to be a reason” and “used in drawing some conclusion or making some decision.” I always intend the second. (It is possible, though not rational, to use a consideration as a reason without believing it is a reason. Cf. weakness of will.)

The main text requires the second interpretation: something incorrectly *believed* to be an x could not be an x . But something incorrectly *used as* an x could be an x . Something incorrectly used in reasoning (an item in flawed reasoning) is still a reason—though not a *good* reason.

bad reasons. Moreover, this should be so on any view. Consider: That I am a Capricorn is a bad reason to believe things will go well today—nonetheless, if I take it to bear on whether things will go well, it is a reason of the right kind. It is a bad reason of the right kind. In contrast, that I will feel better if I believe things will go well is a reason of the wrong kind. However, other things equal, it is a pretty good reason—just as it is a pretty good reason to take an aspirin or get some sleep, other things equal. It is a good reason of the wrong kind.

(Because my solution draws the right/wrong distinction orthogonally to the good/bad distinction, it does not solve the problem facing the fitting-attitudes analysis. It rather shows that the analysis faces an additional hurdle: it must rule out *bad* reasons of the right kind.¹⁰)

Thus it is, I claim, that we should draw the distinction between the right and wrong kind of reason for attitudes of the sort formed by settling questions: The right kind are those that bear or are taken to bear on the question(s), the positive settling of which amounts to forming the attitude. The wrong kind count in favor of (or against) the attitude in some other way.

Notice, this distinction cannot be drawn among reasons for *actions*. Were we to try to draw the distinction here, we would say the right kind of reason bear on a question, the settling of which amounts to acting. But settling a question *doesn't* amount to acting—it amounts to intending. If we (wrongly) ignore this, then it would seem, intuitively, that the right kind of reason would bear on the question of whether so to act. The wrong kind would count in favor of (or against) acting *without* bearing on that question. But *anything* that counts in favor of (or against) acting *thereby* bears on the question of whether so to act. So, we would conclude there are no reasons of the wrong kind, for action. (Though, really, the distinction simply cannot be drawn.)

¹⁰ Those who identify “the wrong-kind-of-reason problem” with the problem facing the fitting-attitudes analysis will correctly think I have not solved it. I doubt it can be solved. See Hieronymi, “The Wrong Kind of Reason.”

I do not find this limitation a weakness. It just means *this* distinction between reasons “of the right kind” and reasons “of the wrong kind” does not appear for action. There are other differences aptly captured by those labels. Reasons “external to a practice,”¹¹ “excluded” by a role,¹² “silenced” by character,¹³ or in the “background,”¹⁴ might be “the wrong kind.” These distinctions will need different accounts. I see no reason to insist they are instances of the distinction between epistemic and pragmatic reasons for belief.

2. Answering Schroeder’s Criticism

Mark Schroeder finds my account (among others) inadequate, because he thinks it does not capture all instances of a single distinction. He provides an argument, and, in doing so, presents a collection of interesting cases.¹⁵ I will criticize the argument and briefly consider the cases.

2.1.

Schroeder begins by collecting four “earmarks” of the right-/wrong-kind distinction. He then locates cases in which those earmarks are present, but in which they distinguish *among* reasons that are not object-given. He concludes that any account that relies on the object-/state-given distinction is incorrect.

The trouble with this argument, in a nutshell, is that, once an account of some phenomenon has been proposed, you cannot simply rely on the initial earmarks, the original symptoms that guided inquiry, to claim the account is incorrect. With an account in hand, we often come to see that certain cases bearing the earmarks are not actually cases of the thing for which we provided an

¹¹ Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Mark Schroeder, "Value and the Right Kind of Reason," *Oxford Studies In Metaethics* 5, no. September (2010).

¹² Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

¹³ John McDowell, "Virtue and reason," *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979).

¹⁴ Mark Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁵ Mark Schroeder, "The Ubiquity of State-Given Reasons," *Ethics* 122, no. 3 (2012): 459-60.

account. And so the account, if it is a good one, can force a reclassification. Once reclassified, the cases pose no threat. Thus, Schroeder's argumentative strategy is seriously flawed.

I will expand. But I will do so by considering the actual structure of Schroeder's argument, which is more complex than just presented.

First, the earmarks: Schroeder collects his earmarks by considering the distinction between epistemic and pragmatic reasons for belief.¹⁶ The first is "asymmetry of motivation:" "it is at least much easier to believe [for epistemic reasons]." Second, "there is some some central rational assessment" that is not affected by pragmatic considerations. Third, "epistemic, but not pragmatic, reasons seem to bear on the *correctness* of the belief." Fourth, "pragmatic reasons for belief have a recognizable 'flavor' that makes them feel intuitively like reasons for other attitudes that exhibit some of the other characteristics of pragmatic reasons for belief."¹⁷

Now, the more complex version of the argument: In the first part of the paper Schroeder presents a claim, "intend object," and he claims that any theory which relies on the state-/object-given distinction will be committed to it. He then presents cases in which "intend object" classifies reasons with the earmarks of the right kind as of the wrong kind. He concludes any such theory is false.

In his own words:

The argument is simple: if [the reasons appearing in his cases] bear all of the marks of right-kind reasons, they are right-kind reasons—after all, the 'right-kind'/'wrong-kind' distinction was just a catch-all label designed to cover an important class of differences that arise in a variety of domains. But since intend object classifies them as being of the wrong kind, any theory which is committed to intend object... is false.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Note how broadly these are drawn. Motivational asymmetry is extremely widespread (it is, e.g., typically more difficult to do something because it is your duty than because it is fun). Pragmatic reasons ground assessments for both rationality and correctness. I suspect it is simply an intuitive sense of the difference between epistemic and pragmatic reasons, rather than these earmarks, that in fact does work for Schroeder.

¹⁸ Ibid., 466.

This is not a good argument. The first claim (“if the reasons bear all the marks of right-kind reasons, they are right-kind reasons”) is an instance of what Schroeder later calls “a key methodological principle: if it quacks like a duck, it’s a duck.”¹⁹ Though this principle makes a regular appearance in Schroeder’s work, I am surprised by it. It is not true. (It is not even true of ducks.)

At the beginning of an inquiry, we may use a word as a catch-all label for a set of earmarks. At that stage, we have no better way of identifying ducks, or kinds of reasons, than by the earmarks. We might then assume, justifiably but defeasibly, that anything that quacks is a duck. However, by the end of the inquiry, we hope to have an account. A good account can force a reclassification of things that, we admit, bear the earmarks. Once we have an account of what it is to be a duck, we could deny the classification to other birds, or to robots at Disneyland, while admitting they quack just like ducks.

So, once we have a good account on hand, we cannot criticize it simply by appealing to the earmarks. That other things quack would be a criticism only if the account either asserted that what it is to be a duck is to quack or else somehow implied that all quacking things are ducks. To determine that, we would need to look at the details of the account.

However, it turns out, the opponent can reject “intend object” (I would). Schroeder acknowledges this, late in his paper. He then considers the opponent who would rely instead on a narrower claim (“intend okay”), which remains silent in his initial cases.

Schroeder provides two responses to this opponent. He claims, first, that because intend okay remains silent on his cases, this opponent cannot give a “general account of the nature of the right/wrong distinction.”

¹⁹ Ibid., 480.

This criticism is again misplaced. If, with Schroeder, we simply *identify* instances of the distinction with instances in which the earmarks appear, we have no reason to assume we will find “a general account of the nature of the right/wrong distinction.” (It seems to me unlikely, given how broadly the earmarks are drawn.) Using a different analogy: Currently, we use “autism” to pick out cases in which a syndrome of symptoms appear. As researchers, we hope to find an underlying structure or mechanism to explain the syndrome. It would be nice if we found one such structure or mechanism. But we must remain open to the possibility that we will find more than one (and so need to distinguish between kinds of “autism”). We cannot cross that theoretical bridge until we come to it. However, if we arrive at what seems a good account of some *subset* of the cases, the mere fact that our account covers only a subset—that it does not provide “a general account of the nature of [autism]”—would not, yet, be a criticism of it. There may be no such nature. Or, it may turn out that the account of the subset will be compatible with an overarching account of the larger class. To criticize the account of the subset, one must either provide a better account of the subclass, provide a better or incompatible account of the larger class, or else show that the account runs into trouble in the cases it means to cover.

Schroeder attempts the last, in his second response. He presents a case about which “intend okay” is not silent and claims it there classifies as of the wrong kind reasons which bear the earmarks of the right kind. He concludes that any account committed to intend okay is false.

But now we return to the difficulty with earmarks. Before we can claim the opponent’s view false, we need to see whether her account can convince us that, even though these reasons quack, they are not ducks. For this, we need to consider the account in some detail. Earmarks, alone, are insufficient.

I have already presented my view, in some detail. After a brief presentation of Schroeder’s cases, I will show how it handles this final case.

2.2.

To simplify, I omit the cases involving belief. Five remain.

In the first three, you have reason to put off making a decision.

In “Driving” you need to decide whether to drive to Los Angeles tomorrow, but you know that later today you will receive further, relevant information: your brother will call to tell you whether he will be there. So you put off your decision.

In “Grad School Decision” you have all relevant information, but in the current circumstances it would not be sensible to devote yourself to the task of making a decision. You need to decide where to go to graduate school, but right now chaos reigns in your kitchen.

In “Naked to Seminar” you are “offered one thousand dollars to not make up [your] mind about whether to wear clothes or go naked” to your talk at Oxford until just before the talk. Again you have reason to put off making a decision—but now it seems of the wrong kind.

In the remaining two cases, you have reason to make your decision now.

“Spouse and Car” adds to Driving the further fact that your spouse needs to coordinate use of the car and so needs you to make your decision now, rather than waiting for the call.

In “Money for Deciding,” instead of being asked to make a decision by your spouse, you are instead offered money to make your decision before your brother calls. Unlike in Spouse and Car, this reason seems of the wrong kind.

2.2.1.

Schroeder interprets the first three as cases in which you have reason *to lack both of two intentions*. He interprets the final two as cases in which you have reason *to have either of two intentions*.

I find it extremely unnatural to characterize these as cases in which I have reason to have or lack either or both of a pair of psychological states. (They seem to me, rather, cases in which I have reason to *do* something—to put off my decision or to decide now.) However, if we think of reasons as a considerations standing in the “counting in favor of” relation to states of mind, we must allow

Schroeder's interpretation. More generally, if we allow that a fact which shows some state of affairs good or useful is a reason for that state of affairs, Schroeder is entitled to his interpretation.

Nonetheless, by thinking of reasons as counting in favor of (or showing good or useful) states of mind, we might ignore a question we must face. The question becomes clear when we stop thinking about facts standing in good-making (or rational- or correct-making) relations to psychological states, and turn our attention, instead, to the *use* of reasons in thought. We need to ask: what I am to *do* with the reasons I have, in these cases? In asking this, we are not asking what thoughts I might have *about* such reasons ("Oh look, this fact counts in favor of that state of affairs, how interesting..."). We are asking, rather, what thoughts I might have *with* these reasons, how I might employ them: How do I, as a thinker, move from my recognition of a fact that provides a reason (that relevant information is forthcoming or that my spouse needs to coordinate) to the state of affairs for which it is a reason (lacking both of two intentions or having either of a pair)? In particular, how do I move from the fact that provides the reason to the state of affairs for which it is a reason, in such a way that the reason was *my* reason for that state of affairs?²⁰

Focusing on Spouse and Car (the case meant to cause trouble for narrower accounts): How am I to move from the fact that my spouse needs to coordinate to the state of mind for which, I admit, that fact gives me reason—namely, the state of housing either an intention to drive to LA or an intention to stay home?

Common sense tells us I will get to that state of mind by deciding whether or not to drive. But notice (and this is Schroeder's point), my spouse's need to coordinate *does not bear* on whether or not to drive. My spouse does not care whether I stay or go; my spouse just needs a decision. So, how do I turn this trick? How do I decide whether or not to drive for reasons that, I acknowledge, do not bear on whether to drive?

²⁰ This is nearly the opening question of Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes.". I give a different answer to Davidson's question in Pamela Hieronymi, "Reasons for Action," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 111(2011).

Notice, everyone must address this puzzle. Any plausible view must be able to understand deciding to drive to LA as answering the question of whether to drive to LA. And any view must admit my spouse's need for a decision does not bear on whether to drive. So any view must explain how I manage to decide whether to drive for reasons that I do not take to bear on the question of whether to drive.

(I can imagine someone trying to answer the puzzle by appeal to "rational well-functioning:" insofar as you are functioning well, as a rational agent, you will transition from recognizing your spouse's needs to making your decision, though you will make your decision for other reasons. I find this an unsatisfying dodge—it says in effect, "you do it, somehow, and it is rational to do so." We knew that much.)

I believe we can and should address this puzzle by distinguishing between deciding whether to drive and deciding to get that decision made. My spouse's need to coordinate does not bear on the first decision but is a perfectly good reason for the second. It does not bear on the root decision of whether to drive, but is a perfectly good reason to decide to get that root decision made. Because it is a good reason to get the root decision made, and because making that decision will be a consequence of my effort to get the decision made, my spouse's need bears Schroeder's earmarks of the right kind of reason for the root decision—it quacks like a duck. But it is still the wrong kind of reason for that decision. It is not a duck, after all.

Taking this more slowly: strictly speaking, I cannot decide to drive to LA for reasons I do not take to bear on whether to drive to LA. Any reason for which I settle the question of whether to drive will *therein* be a reason I take to bear on whether to drive. Thus, if I do not take my spouse's needs to bear on whether to drive, I will not decide that question for that reason. My spouse's needs are, indeed, the wrong kind of reason for intending to drive.

Yet, I somehow manage to make up my mind, and, moreover, I manage to do so *because* my spouse needs to coordinate. How do I manage that?

Notice, when a fact (e.g., that the room is stuffy) counts in favor of, or somehow shows good, some state of affairs (e.g., the state of affairs in which the window is open), that fact might provide me with a reason *to act*—to act so as to bring about that state of affairs.²¹ That it is stuffy provides me with reason to bring it about that the window is open—or, as we say in English, “to open the window.”

Likewise, the fact that believing *p* would improve my mood can count in favor of the state of affairs in which I believe *p*. It can thus provide me with reason to act so as to bring it about that I believe *p*. We might be tempted to shorten the locution, as in the case of window-opening, and say that the fact that believing *p* would improve my mood provides me reason “to believe *p*.” But putting things this way courts confusion, since believing *p* (unlike the state of the window) is something we do, and, moreover, something we do by settling a *different* question (the question of whether *p*). Thus, a “reason to believe *p*” is most naturally understood as a reason that bears positively on *that* question: these are, in some sense, belief’s own reasons—reasons of the right kind. Since the fact that believing *p* would improve my mood is not something I take to bear on whether *p*, it is confusing to say it gives me reason “to believe *p*.” Nonetheless, it may be a very good reason to act so as to bring it about that I believe *p*.²²

Likewise, I suggest, in Spouse and Car. One of the states of affairs I can act so as to bring about is the state in which I have decided whether to *x*. My spouse provides me a reason to engage in this action—to bring it about that I make a decision, or, we might say, to set myself to make the decision, or to get the decision made. We might, again, be tempted to shorten the locution and say it provides me with a reason “to make the decision” or “to decide.” The temptation is even stronger,

²¹ i.e., to settle the question of whether so to act, therein intend, and execute the intention in action. See Ibid.

²² I do not say it is “the right kind of reason” to act; we cannot draw the distinction for actions. (It is the right kind of reason for *intending* to act.)

here, because it is typically much easier to bring it about that you decide whether to x than to bring it about that you believe p . But, again, deciding whether to x is something we do by settling a *different* question (the question of whether to x). Since I do not take my spouse's need to bear on *that* question (whether to drive), we should not, if being precise, say it provides me with reasons for which I decide whether to drive. It, rather, provides me with reason to get that decision made. We can, then, say my spouse's needs provides me with reason *to get the decision made*, without providing me a reason *for which to make the decision*.²³

This distinction may seem subtle. So it is. It may seem it is just an unfortunate upshot of my view about reasons. It is not. It is, rather, one way to solve a problem any view must solve—a problem that comes to light when we consider the use of reasons in thought, and a solution available if we understand reasons as considerations bearing on questions.

Moreover, we can argue for the distinction in another way: we often do one without doing the other. You might decide to get a decision made, but find you cannot: you are stymied by indecision. In such a case (for many of us, familiar), you cannot do what you decided to do—make your decision.

Once we acknowledge this distinction, I can address Schroeder's final challenge: I can say why the reason in Spouse and Car quacks, even though it is not the right kind of reason for intending to drive (nor for intending to stay home). It is not the right kind of reason because it does not bear on the question, the settling of which would amount to intending—it does not bear on whether or not to drive. Nonetheless, it quacks like a the right kind reason, because it is a perfectly good reason to bring about either intention. Because it is a perfectly good reason for this action, and because the action both is not difficult (in the case Schroeder presents) and, if successful, will bring about one of

²³ Marking this difference may smooth some of the difficult terrain surrounding “acts of will.” Certain “acts of will” contain *two* intentions—the intention to get the decision made and the intention formed when that first intention is successfully executed—while others involve only one: we decide without deciding to get the decision made. Thanks are due to Benjamin McMyler for helpful correspondence on this issue.

the intentions, it bears Schroeder's earmarks. The reason lacks "motivational" difficulties.²⁴ One might think it "makes rational" and "shows correct" the state of mind of having made the decision (though it does not make rational or show correct the *particular* decision—because, again, it does not bear on whether to drive). Perhaps it has the right "feel." Nonetheless, quacking does not make it a duck.²⁵

2.2.2.

Due to limitations of space, I address the remaining cases briefly.

In Driving, your thoughts are directed, not at the question of whether to lack certain intentions, but at the root question of whether to drive. Before your brother calls, you find the information at hand insufficient to answer the question. As a result, you lack either intention.

In Grad School Decision, though you have all the relevant information, it is not clear what to do; you need to deliberate.²⁶ Deliberating takes time. In the circumstances, it would be silly to deliberate. So you put off that task. As a result, you lack either intention.

In Naked for Seminar, it is obvious what to do: wear clothes. Thus, to win the money, you would need to *revise* your intention to wear clothes. But the offered money does not bear on whether to wear clothes. It instead bears *only* on whether to house the intention. It is the wrong kind of reason.

We can now notice a complication about Spouse and Car. If I am right about Driving, then, before your spouse made the request, you found the reasons at hand insufficient to decide what to do. But your spouse's need bears only on whether to get the decision made, not on what to do. So, how can you get the decision made? Something must have changed your threshold of sufficiency.

²⁴ If, instead, your spouse needed you to decide whether to take a job before all the information was in, you might encounter motivational difficulties.

²⁵ I thus provide what Schroeder calls a "two-stage" solution. Schroeder thinks such solutions fail, because we can draw the right/wrong distinction at the first stage. But since that stage is an *action*, we cannot.

²⁶ Settling a question is not deliberating. It happens if deliberation successfully concludes, but it does not always require deliberation.

To address this, we can add Schroeder's details: Unless you are *very* confident (more than 80%) your brother is in LA, you have most reason to stay home. Currently, you are only 80% confident your brother will call to tell you he is there. So, were you to decide now, you would decide to stay home—but you would also be 80% confident you will later have reason to change your mind. You cannot, then, settle the question of whether to drive, because the reasons at hand lead you to anticipate changing your mind. You cannot make a definite plan.²⁷

When your spouse needs to coordinate, your situation changes. You no longer anticipate having reason to change your mind when your brother calls: because your spouse will be relying on your decision, you will have (new) reason to do whatever you decided to do (as Schroeder notes). Thus your spouse's request serves two purposes. It both gives you reason to get the decision made and changes your anticipated future so as to render the reasons at hand sufficient for deciding.

Not so in Money for Deciding. Schroeder stipulates the money does not give you reason to do what you decide to do. So, although the offered money gives you reason to get the decision made, you should still anticipate you will have reason to change your mind. And so you should still find the reasons at hand insufficient to settle the question at hand.²⁸

3.

I have here revisited my solution to the wrong kind of reasons problem and defended it against Schroeder's criticism. Schroeder claimed it must be incorrect, because it classifies, as of the wrong kind, reasons which bear earmarks of the right kind. It classifies as non-ducks things that quack. I defended my account simply by pointing out that a good account need not classify everything that quacks as a duck. A good account can force a reclassification of things bearing the earmarks that initially guide inquiry. I then explained how my account would reclassify Schroeder's cases.

²⁷ Whatever else they are, intentions for future actions are plans. See Michael E. Bratman, *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

²⁸ I say you should. I am not sure you will. This case differs importantly from the puzzle in Gregory Kavka, "The Toxin Puzzle," *Analysis* 43(1983).

It might be said, in reply, that, if certain distinctive features reliably occur together, if there is a distinctive syndrome of symptoms that recurs in a variety of cases, we should look for a single underlying disease. I agree. Although I am not convinced that Schroeder's earmarks describe a distinctive class, there may yet be some larger underlying unity, and perhaps we will come to understand it. But until we do—until we have, on hand, a more encompassing account—we do not know whether an account like mine, which handles only some of the larger class, will be overturned or instead vindicated by it.

These dialectical points aside, I have tried to advance discussion by highlighting how the standard way of thinking about reasons—as considerations standing in relation to attitudes—obscures rational agency. It obscures the *use* of reasons in thought. By instead thinking of reasons as relating, first, to questions, we force ourselves to relate reasons to attitudes *via* some question. By doing that, we bring our agency with respect to our attitudes into view: as thinkers, we answer questions and therein hold, form, revise, or modify our attitudes. Certain reasons seem to be of the wrong kind, because they count in favor of an attitude without bearing on the relevant question(s). Solving the wrong kind of reason problem is but one of the many benefits of bringing rational agency into view.²⁹

²⁹ Thanks are due, first, to Mark Schroeder, for prompting this discussion, and to David Shoemaker, for inviting me to participate in a PEA Soup discussion and so sparking this paper. I am grateful for participants of that discussion. Thanks are also due to Barbara J. Grosz, John F. Horty, Mark C. Johnson, Benjamin McMyler, and Sheldon R. Smith, for comments and conversation. Finally, I gratefully acknowledge the support of the American Council of Learned Societies, in the form of a Frederick Burkhardt Residential Fellowship for Recently Tenured Scholars, and of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, where this paper was drafted.