

Aretaic Appraisal and Practical Reasons

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Abstract

When we criticize someone for being unjust, deceitful, or imprudent—or commend him as just, truthful, or wise—what is the content of our evaluation? On one way of thinking, evaluating agents in terms that employ aretaic concepts evaluates how they regulate their actions (and judgment-sensitive attitudes) in light of the reasons that bear on them. On this virtue-centered view of practical reasons appraisal, evaluations of agents in terms of ethical virtues (and vices) are, *inter alia*, evaluations of them as practical reasoners. Here I consider and respond to an objection that threatens to debunk the virtue-centered view.

Introduction

When we criticize someone for being unjust, ungenerous, deceitful, or imprudent—or commend him by means of the respective contraries—what is the content of our evaluation? What, for example, does E. M. Forster take himself to be saying about Rickie Elliot's father in suggesting he is an unkind and cowardly soul? Here is Forster's description:

Mr. Elliot was a barrister. In appearance he resembled his son, being weakly and lame, with hollow little cheeks, a broad white band of forehead, and stiff impoverished hair. His voice, which he did not transmit, was very suave, with a fine command of cynical intonation. By altering it ever so little he could make people wince, especially if they were simple or poor. Nor did he transmit his eyes.

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Their peculiar flatness, as if the soul looked through dirty window-panes, the unkindness of them, the cowardice, the fear in diem, were to trouble the world no longer.¹

Noting that evaluations of someone as unkind and cowardly employ concepts of vice, one obvious answer to our question is that the person criticized possesses the noted vice (or, in the case of commendation, the noted virtue). In the present state of moral philosophical debate, however, such an answer courts controversy. My aim here is to clarify the nature of the debate and suggest how best to settle it.²

On one way of thinking, evaluating agents in terms that employ concepts of virtue or vice—hereafter, aretaic appraisal—amounts to evaluating how they fare with respect to the regulation of their actions (or, more generally, their intentions and other judgment-sensitive attitudes) in light of the reasons that bear on them. On one such view, call it the virtue-centered view of practical reasons appraisal, when Forster characterizes Mr. Elliot as unkind and cowardly, he means to suggest that Mr. Elliot fails to appreciate certain reasons that bear on his actions: for example, reasons for not taking delight in a skill for making simple or poor people wince (among them the fact that one's pleasure is not properly gained through the gratuitous pain of the innocent) and reasons for not taking one's wife's choice of a rug—however aesthetically awkward—as a pretext for belittlement and abandonment (among them the fact that one's spouse warrants more respect). In short, on the virtue-centered view of practical reasons appraisal, a virtue is an excellence concerning the recognition of, and motivation by, some part of the domain of practical reasons. A vice is the corresponding deficiency. The proponent of the virtue-centered theory of practical reasons appraisal thus takes the relation that V-REASON expresses between aretaic appraisal and practical reasons appraisal to hold (where A ranges over agents, Λ over vices, and V over virtues):

V-REASON

If A is Λ , then (*inter alia*) A fails to respond to certain reasons for acting, namely, the reasons for acting whose appreciation is constitutive of the virtue, V , that is the contrary of Λ .³

Understood thus, a virtue-centered view of practical reasons appraisal possesses a certain prima facie plausibility. In everyday contexts, no less than literary, we typically regard how agents frame their choice situations, how they attend (or fail to attend) to certain facts as reason-giving, whether and how much they weigh certain considerations against competing ones, and so on, as evidence pertinent to whether they possess the

good and bad traits of practical character that the ethical virtues and vices, respectively, purport to mark. The agent who routinely fails to regard the fact that another person has an undefeated right to such-and-such as a reason weighing in favor of providing that person such-and-such (when it is within her power to do so) is unjust; the agent who routinely disregards the fact that what she says is a lie as a reason weighing against saying it is dishonest; and so on. Garden-variety examples such as these suggest that we consider proper responsiveness (or lack thereof) to reasons for action to ground ascriptions of virtue and vice.⁴

My aim here is to consider one influential line of argument against a virtue-centered view of practical reasons appraisal, one that proceeds from a rejection of V-REASON in what I call its pluralist form. There are in fact at least two lines of rejection that someone antecedently persuaded by an alternative theory of practical reason might follow. One is an accommodating reply; the other is a debunking reply. The accommodating reply attempts to show that some antecedently compelling theory of practical reason can vindicate those reasons for acting that the theory of ethical virtue takes to be constitutive of the virtues.⁵ The debunking response, in contrast, threatens to undermine the virtue-centered account from the start, by claiming a conceptual distinction between aretaic appraisal and appraisal involving the concept of a practical reason. It remains to be seen just how such evaluations are supposed to differ in kind. For now, I offer as an expression of such a debunking reply another description of a callous husband, this one due to Bernard Williams.

Suppose ... I think someone (I use "ought" in an unspecific way here) ought to be nicer to his wife. I say "You have a reason to be nicer to her." He says, "What reason?" I say, "Because she is your wife." He says—and he is a very hard case—"I don't care. Don't you understand? I really do not care." I try various things on him, and try to involve him in this business; and I find that he really is a hard case: there is *nothing* in his motivational set that gives him a reason to be nicer to his wife as things are.

Williams continues, regarding the evaluation of the agent he *does* find appropriate in such a case.

There are many things I can say about or to this man: that he is ungrateful, inconsiderate, hard, sexist, nasty, selfish, brutal, and many other disadvantageous things. I shall presumably say, whatever else I say, that it would be better if he were nicer to her.⁶

One thing that Williams supposes his opponent will wish to say—and which he denies has any clear sense in the case at

hand—is that this man *is irrational* or that *he has a reason to be nicer to his wife*.⁷ Williams understands the disadvantageous things that he *is* willing to say about this man to not entail that the man is thereby acting irrationally or acting against a reason he has to behave otherwise. This understanding of Williams’s criticism is mandated by what he dubs his “internalism” about reasons for action. Internalism about reasons, in short, entails the rejection of V-REASON in its pluralist form. I say that internalism denies V-REASON in its *pluralist* form because one way of interpreting Williams’s view, as translated into the idiom of virtue and vice, is as holding that, with respect to the domain of practical reasons, the only vice (and so the only substitution instance for \wedge) is practical irrationality and the only virtue (and so the only substitution instance for \vee) is practical rationality.

Finally, note that I present the criticism that Williams puts in the mouth of his opponent (namely, that this man is irrational or he has a reason to be nicer) disjunctively to mark the fact that at different times Williams offers different formulations of the view opposing his internalism about reasons. Indeed, Williams’s rejection of V-REASON in its pluralist form turns on his conflating these two distinct types of claims, that is, claims concerning when one is irrational in failing to Φ and claims concerning when there is a reason for one to Φ . Attending to how one might suppose a plausible thesis about the former to lend support to a much less plausible thesis about the latter will help focus what is at issue in the debate between Williams’s internalism about practical reason and those drawn to the virtue-centered conception of practical reason I favor. To anticipate, I argue that the virtue theorist should concede an internalist understanding of *practical irrationality* as involving, roughly, a form of self-inconsistency.⁸ So understood, a charge of irrationality is, as I shall put it, both reason entailing and capability entailing with respect to the reason entailed. That is, in acting irrationally one flouts a reason one is legitimately regarded as capable of appreciating. For all the internalist establishes, aretaic appraisal is reason entailing, as well. However, and this appears to be the real source of the internalist objection, aretaic appraisal is not capability entailing with regard to the reasons it entails. That is, in acting unjustly (say), you flout a reason that there is no presumption you are, as things stand with you, capable of appreciating. Having defended this understanding of the internalist objection, I note that the case blocking the extension of internalism about practical rationality to internalism about reasons turns on the rejection of the principle that ought implies can. I conclude by trying to diffuse the appearance that this is an unhappy consequence of the virtue-centered view of practical reason.

1. Internalism and the Debunking Objection

Internalism about reasons for action, as I use that description here, is a view concerning when a claim that A has a reason to Φ is true, namely:

Reason-Deliberative Route

A has a reason to Φ only if he could reach the conclusion to Φ by a sound deliberative route from the motivations he already has.⁹

The view also is commonly expressed in terms of a conceptual connection between reasons and rational motivation. For example:

Reason-Rational Motivation

A has a reason, r , to Φ only if: if A deliberated rationally with respect to r , A would be motivated by that deliberation to Φ on the basis of r .¹⁰

Which we can reformulate as follows:

Reason-Irrationality

A has a reason, r , to Φ only if: A would be irrational with respect to r if A would not be motivated to Φ on the basis of r .

When I speak of the “internalism constraint” on reasons for acting I mean to refer to the substantive constraint on reasons for acting that Reason-Deliberative Route and Reason-Irrationality purport to provide.

With respect to Reason-Deliberative Route, Williams dubs the motivations an agent already has the agent’s “subjective motivational set,” or “S.”¹¹ The conclusion that there are no external reasons—that is, that the only interpretation of claims about when A has a reason to Φ on which the claim is true is the internal interpretation—is supposed to follow from each of two related arguments: one that proceeds from consideration of an explanatory requirement on reasons for action and a second that proceeds from consideration of the apparent obscurity of advising an agent that he or she has a reason to Φ in cases where the supposed reason is in no way connected with elements in the agent’s S. Call these the argument from explanation and the argument from reasons’ advising function. We can reconstruct the relevant arguments as follows:

The argument from explanation

- (1) “If something [namely, the fact that r] can be a reason for action, then it could be someone’s reason for acting on a particular occasion, and it would then figure in an explanation of that action.”¹²
- (2) “[N]o external reason statement could *by itself* offer an explanation of that action ... [because] they can be true independently of the agent’s motivations.”¹³
- (3) “[N]othing can explain an agent’s (intentional) actions except something that motivates him so to act.”¹⁴
- (4) Insofar as “believing that a particular consideration is a reason to act in a particular way provide[s], or indeed constitute[s], a motivation to act,” believing an external reason statement can explain an agent’s intentional action.¹⁵
- (5) The agent with such a belief is one about whom an *internal* reason statement could truly be made: he is one with an appropriate motivation in his S .¹⁶
- (6) Statements that purport to cite external reasons, when true, in fact cite internal reasons.
- (7) There are no external reasons.

Williams takes the argument from explanation to support Reason-Deliberative Route by establishing that reasons for action, if *bona fide*, must be grounded in the agent’s motivations in such a way that the agent can arrive at such a reason through deliberation and, once arrived at, have their motivational potential secured. Only thus can reasons explain action. Furthermore, the argument from explanation is supposed to support Reason-Rational Motivation because what agents come to believe when they believe they have a reason to Φ , and so when that belief explains their Φ -ing, either just is or entails the proposition that they would be motivated to Φ were they to deliberate rationally. The challenge the argument from explanation presents to the opponent Williams dubs the externalist, then, is to account for the explanatory dimension of external reasons.

The argument from reasons’ advising function presents yet another challenge. We can reconstruct that argument thus:

The argument from reasons’ advising function

- (1) The truth of an external reasons statement potentially grounds a charge of irrationality against the agent who flouts the reason.¹⁷

- (2) A bona fide charge of irrationality entails that the agent has flouted a reason he has to do otherwise. (This follows from reasons' advising function.)
- (3) A charge of irrationality, "once the basis of an internal reason claim has been clearly laid aside, is bluff."¹⁸
- (4) External claims about reasons for action are false; "The only real claims about reasons for action will be internal claims."¹⁹

The challenge that the argument from the obscurity of external reasons presents the external reasons theorist is, Williams suggests, that of answering this question: "What is the difference supposed to be between saying that the agent [for example, the callous husband] has a reason to act more considerately, and saying one of the many other things we can say to people whose behaviour does not accord with what we think it should be?"²⁰ So far as the proponent of the virtue-centered view of practical reasons appraisal is concerned, when one of the other many things is an expression of aretaic appraisal, *there may be no difference*: we are just saying something about reasons. The real challenge that Williams is hinting at here is that of accounting for the advisory function of reasons. In the absence of such a function, Williams suggests, claims about reasons amount to mere bluff or what he elsewhere derides as browbeating. The externalist's challenge here, then, is to explain how a form of reasons appraisal that does not relativize reasons to an agent's existing motivations coheres with our practices of appealing to reasons in providing advice.

Now, philosophers have responded to Williams's internalism (as expressed in Reason-Deliberative Route and Reason-Rational Motivation) that, in the absence of some substantive account of what qualifies as a sound deliberative route or rational deliberation, it is far from clear that anyone need deny the view. Thus, Korsgaard has famously argued that there is no route to skepticism about the motivational powers of practical reason as such independently of substantive skepticism about the *content* of practical reason, that is, skepticism about the legitimate forms that such reasoning may take.²¹ To be sure, Williams's internalism provides a basis for rejecting V-REASON only if it in fact provides substantive constraints on reasons for acting. The arguments from explanation and from reasons' advising function purport to generate such constraints.²² If Korsgaard is correct, they can do so only if supported by some antecedent argument in defense of a particular substantive view of what counts as a sound deliberative route or as rational deliberation. But insofar as our views about what qualifies as such are inextricably tied up with our intuitions about what

kinds of facts provide good reasons, pursuing the debate in these terms appears rather quickly destined for a standoff. If I am correct, the proponent of *V-REASON* has an advantage over the Kantian rationalist here. She does so because she can concede to the internalist his understanding of the requirements of rationality and the relevance to those requirements of the existence of a deliberative route proceeding from the agent's *S* while maintaining that, for all the concession, *V-REASON* on its pluralist interpretation is true. The concession proceeds by acknowledging that the absence of a sound deliberative route that an agent could traverse from his *S* to a reason to Φ arguably constrains our assessment of the agent's practical rationality while rejecting the claim that this yields a substantive constraint on reasons for action as such, that is, while rejecting the claim that such a route is necessary for the truth of the claim that *A* has a reason to Φ . In short, the proponent of the virtue-centered view of practical reasons appraisal can hold both that Mr. Elliot has a reason to be nicer to his wife and that he is not necessarily practically irrational in failing to appreciate it.

This path of lesser—if not least—resistance is the path I shall now pursue. I do so by way of a discussion of reasons for belief in order to highlight the significance of a move that the internalist makes in the case of reasons for action that might otherwise go missing.

2. The Deliberative Route and Reasons for Belief

I want to begin by considering what an internalism constraint would look like were we to pursue Williams's lead in the case of reasons for belief.²³ By parity of the reasoning Williams employs in the case of action, we get in the case of belief:

Reason_{Belief}-Deliberative Route

A has a reason to believe that *p* only if he could reach the conclusion that *p* by a sound deliberative route from the materials present in his subjective epistemic set *E*.

We could also express the view in terms of a conceptual connection between reasons and rational assent. For example:

Reason_{Belief}-Rational Assent

A has a reason, *r*, to believe that *p* only if: if *A* deliberated rationally with respect to *r*, he would be motivated to assent to *p* on the basis of *r*.

Which we can formulate as follows:

Reason_{Belief}-Irrationality

A has a reason, *r*, to believe that *p* only if: A would be irrational with respect to *r* if A would not be motivated to assent to *p* on the basis of *r*.

Although I won't replicate the analogous arguments from the explanatory role of reasons for belief and their bluffless, nonbrowbeating advising function, I assume that it's easy enough to see how those arguments would go.

By way of assessing these arguments in the case of reasons for belief, let's consider as an epistemic analogue to Mr. Elliot and Williams's unkind husband a person possessing certain intellectual vices. His name is Michel.

Michel hails from a family distinguished by its anti-intellectualism—a history that explains his disparaging attitudes toward the subtleties (and not-so subtleties) of argument. He is hasty, being quick to jump to conclusions, and, once there, displays an obstinacy that suggests he believes their truth to be guaranteed by the fact that he holds them. At his worst, he proves obtuse and indifferent to argument. These qualities often manifest themselves in the course of Michel's work as a baggage agent at the city airport.

One day, Michelle, a graduate student in philosophy with a heretofore unwavering faith in the power of argument, finds herself in the following predicament: Michel our baggage agent is forbidding her to board her plane before paying a fine for her purportedly overweight luggage, luggage whose weight our baggage agent has, at a glance, concluded is beyond the legal limits. Our traveler is skeptical: she knows, and reports to our baggage agent, that the weight limits for luggage exiting this particular country are the same as those for the countries through which she passed on her way in and that the luggage has up to this point been weighed in her presence and revealed to be well within the requisite limits. Furthermore, she entered the country beset with gifts and, given an unfavorable exchange rate, is leaving without any additional purchases or gifts—indeed without anything additional—stored in her bags. Confident, then, that her bag is well within the legal weight limits, our traveler requests that Michel in fact weigh her bags. When he complies and the scale shows a weight within legal limits, our baggage agent concludes, apparently sincerely, that the scale is broken.

Our incredulous traveler at this point recites the evidence to the contrary—and is met with silence. Her second recitation of the evidence only succeeds in arousing our baggage agent's disdain for argument. Finally, our traveler implores our baggage agent: "You're not being reasonable!" To which our baggage agent replies, arms waving in the air: "Reasonable? Who cares about reasonable?"

I find it natural to say of this example that our traveler and our baggage agent each has reason, indeed conclusive reason, for assenting to the conclusion that the luggage is within the legal weight limits. All the evidence to which they are privy weighs in favor of that conclusion and no countervailing evidence (other than Michel's initial impression of the bag) weighs against it. Short of overwhelming evidence in the reliability of our baggage agent's eyeballing ability—evidence I assume is not forthcoming—the weight of the evidence is in favor of the fine-forfeiting conclusion. On the plausible assumption that evidence for the truth of a proposition provides a reason to believe the proposition, Michel's intellectual vices blind him to the reasons there are for believing that the luggage is within the legal limits.

I described Michel as hasty (that is, he displays a tendency to jump to a conclusion on the basis of insufficient evidence), obstinate (that is, he displays a tendency to stick to a conclusion he has made merely because he has made it, thereby disregarding countervailing evidence), obtuse (that is, he sometimes fails to be persuaded of the truth of a proposition in the face of acknowledged evidence), and given to illogicality (that is, he sometimes displays an apparent indifference to principles of logical inference by means of which intellectual conviction typically is conveyed). In characterizing Michel as hasty, obstinate, obtuse, and illogical in the senses given by my parenthetical glosses, I take it that I am saying something about how things stand with him regarding recognizing reasons for belief and following those reasons where they lead. That is, I take it that insofar as hastiness, obstinacy, obtuseness, and illogicality of thought are intellectual vices, aretaic appraisal in the domain of belief is reason-entailing in the way the proponent of the virtue-centered view of practical reasons appraisal takes such appraisal to be in the domain of action. The proponent of what we might call the virtue-centered view of epistemic reasons appraisal thus holds, where A ranges over agents, Λ over vices, and V over virtues:

T-REASON

If A is Λ , then (*inter alia*) A fails to respond to certain reasons for believing that apply to A , namely, the reasons for believing whose appreciation is constitutive of the virtue, V , that is the contrary of Λ .²⁴

One of my hopes in introducing Michel is to pump the intuition that his deficiencies involve ignorance of reasons whatever we suppose the contents of his subjective epistemic set to be. Apparently, this intuition is more easily pumped in the case of reasons for belief than in the case of reasons for

action. To further grease the pump, consider how tempting you find the following response to Michel.

Suppose ... I think Michel ought (I use "ought" in an unspecific way here) to conclude that a certain piece of luggage is within a certain weight limit. I say "You have a reason to draw that conclusion." He says, "What reason?" I say, "The considerations our traveler has adduced." He says—and he is a very hard case—"I'm not convinced. Don't you understand? I really am not convinced." I try various things on him, and try to involve him in this business; and I find that he really is a hard case: there is *nothing* in his subjective epistemic set that gives him a reason to assent to the conclusion.

Our imitator continues, regarding the evaluation of the agent he does find appropriate in such a case:

There are many things I can say about or to this man: that he is hasty, obstinate, illogical, and many other disadvantageous things. I shall presumably say, whatever else I say, that it would be better if he were to assent to the conclusion. However, the one thing I deny is that our baggage agent has a reason to assent to the conclusion.

One will not be tempted to this response if one shares the epistemic externalist intuition that the correct answer to the question of what reasons for belief there are does not relativize the answer to the contents of the subjective epistemic sets of individual believers. An intuition, of course, is not an argument. However, I do think the initial plausibility of externalism about reasons for belief places on the internalist about reasons for belief a burden of proof that appears more readily diverted to the externalist in the case of reasons for action.²⁵ The burden in this case is for the internalist to either block the extension of the arguments from explanation and obscurity to the case of belief or to further defend the plausibility of internalism in the belief case.

An internalist sympathetic to the strength of the externalist intuition in the case of belief might well attempt to block the extension of the arguments for internalism about reasons for action to the epistemic domain. One well-trod road toward that goal begins with the observation that there exists in the case of belief a constitutive goal to provide the external standards in question: namely, the truth. The standard of truth for beliefs provides us direction in idealizing away from a particular deliberator's subjective epistemic set in determining the reasons for belief that apply to them in their circumstances. The road typically culminates with the conclusion that, in the case of reasons for action, there is no such external standard available. Hence, the intuition that there are external reasons for belief is

vindicated and an asymmetry revealed that blocks the extension of arguments for internalism about reasons for action to reasons for belief.²⁶

Such, however, is not a line Williams is ready to make—however ready to ascribe it to him some commentators appear to be.²⁷ The fact that Williams apparently is not even *tempted* to gain a less contentious result in the case of belief at the expense of an asymmetry between the epistemic and practical domains of reasons lends support to the thought that a general point about reasons—one that applies to the epistemic no less than the practical domain—is at work in Williams’s internalism. Asking what that general point must be for internalism to be a plausible position in the epistemic case thus provides a key to the correct understanding of Williams’s internalism about reasons for action.

Let us return, then, to Michel and ask what the internalist about reasons for belief has to say about his case. We first should note that, as described, Michel’s failure to draw the conclusion is overdetermined. Let’s distinguish, then, two scenarios. Let’s suppose that in scenario A Michel grants the premises of the argument that our traveler presents to him—that is, he grants that what she says about the bag’s recent history and contents is all true. Nonetheless, our baggage agent fails to infer from these premises the conclusion that the bag is within the legal weight limits. In this scenario, Michel’s illogicality explains the relevant failure. (Thus, in scenario A, we can imagine the following twist in our story as originally described: “Illogical!” our baggage agent scoffs, “Who says things have to be logical!”).

In scenario B, let us suppose that Michel’s failure is explained not by his illogicality but by the fact that he is obtuse. His problem is one of not regarding the facts as presented as constituting evidence for, that is, as bearing on the truth of the conclusion that the bag is within the legal weight limit. I will return to the distinction between our two scenarios.

Now, key to the internalist’s assessment of Michel with regard to his reasons-responsiveness is the question whether there is a sound deliberative route from his S to his conclusion. As Williams presents it, the question is not whether there exists a sound deliberative route, understood in some agent-neutral sense, from Michel’s S to the conclusion but whether, as Williams puts it, he (*Michel*) could reach the conclusion by a sound deliberative route from his S. Here, perhaps, is the place to emphasize that if internalism is to retain its credentials as a normative as opposed to merely descriptive account of reasons, it must in answering our question about Michel walk a fine line between two extremes. On one extreme, the internalist must avoid relativizing reasons to an agent’s actual deliberative stance, however misguided—for at that extreme we find a

merely descriptive account of reasons. On the other extreme, the internalist must avoid so idealizing away from the agent's actual deliberative stance that reasons become altogether detached from the agent's motivations and instead determined by some external standard (one that will provide criteria for the existence of a sound deliberative route irrespective of the possibility of the agent's traversing it). Williams's method for avoiding these two extremes is to allow us to correct for certain flaws in an agent's actual deliberative stance, provided that the means by which we do the correcting secures the reason's accessibility to the agent himself, however unaware of it he might currently be. The means by which Williams affects this trick is by way of certain assumptions concerning the contents of any rational deliberator's S.

Consider Williams's familiar example of a person who wants a drink of gin and believes that the stuff in the glass is gin when in fact it is petrol. Williams suggests that were we to opt for saying that he has a reason to drink that stuff, we would be ignoring the normative dimension of reasons statements. Williams thus suggests that we relativize what the agent has reason to do to an *accurate* view of his circumstances, thereby correcting for his false belief. It is significant that Williams effects this move without allowing any appeal to an external standard of truth to, by itself, dictate what reasons this agent has—and would continue to have no matter what the contents of his S.²⁸ Instead, Williams suggests that any rational deliberator, as such, has in his S a general interest in being factually informed (as well as being rationally correctly informed). As a result, the agent cannot, by his own *best* lights, traverse a sound deliberative route from his S to the conclusion to drink this stuff. It follows from Reason-Deliberative Route that the agent has no reason to drink the gin. Consequently, the relativity of reasons to an agent's S is maintained.

The difference between the two methods of correction becomes most salient once we see what the internalist says about the agent who lacks what Williams calls a general interest in being factually informed. Considering a person who "had an overwhelming need to be deceived," Williams concludes: "If his relations to reality were so poorly negotiated that he actually needed to believe what was false, then perhaps he would have reason to acquire false beliefs—in that particular respect."²⁹ In fact, the internalist position regarding such a person would appear to be even less plausible than this: on the internalist view, if such an agent has no general interest in being factually informed—if she can see nothing to be said for believing truths—there are in her case no reasons for believing truths. The result highlights what one might have considered the internalist absurdity of allowing the reasons for belief that there are to be relativized to individual psychology.

We can apply the lessons of the petrol case to Michel. Could he reach the conclusion that the luggage was within the legal weight limits by a sound deliberative route from the materials in his subjective epistemic set? As the petrol case demonstrates, we need to be careful about the relevant interpretation of “he could” here. As described, Michel cannot, that is, *cannot by his own lights at the present moment*, traverse a sound deliberative route from the materials in his subjective epistemic set to the conclusion that the baggage is within the legal weight limits. Michel’s hastiness, obstinacy, and illogicality are on ample display in the interaction with our traveler and sound deliberation is precisely what such intellectual vices serve to undermine. If we are imagining the situation with Michel to be as described in scenario A, then Michel cannot, *by his own lights at the present moment*, traverse the deliberative route in question precisely because his illogicality prevents him from making the requisite inference. If we are imagining the situation with Michel to be as described in scenario B, then Michel cannot, *by his own lights at the present moment*, traverse the deliberative route in question precisely because his hastiness and obstinacy are motivating him to ignore the evidence for the truth of the conclusion. In short, if we are correct in our assessment of Michel, then—whether we have scenario A or B in mind—he cannot *by his own lights at the present moment* traverse a sound deliberative route from the materials in his subjective epistemic set to the fine-forfeiting conclusion.

As the petrol case demonstrates, however, this does not settle the question whether Michel has a reason to assent to the fine-forfeiting conclusion (nor whether he’d be irrational in doing so). Recalling that Williams argues in the petrol case that “any rational deliberative agent has in his S a general interest in being factually and rationally correctly informed,”³⁰ we might suppose that, insofar as he is a candidate for rational appraisal at all, Michel, too, has such general interests in his S; when we speak of his hastiness and illogicality, we mean to refer not to deficiencies in the composition of his S itself but to obstacles that prevent its proper expression. Understood in this way, the internalist conclusion is that our baggage agent has no reason to conclude that the bag is over the legal limits and perhaps (noting that Williams thinks the presence of such a general interest to provide a sufficient condition of an agent’s having a reason though not one he cares to defend³¹) he has a reason to conclude that the bag is within the legal weight limit—this whether we have in mind scenario A or B. In scenario A, we note that any rational deliberative agent has in his subjective epistemic set a general interest in reasoning correctly; in scenario B, we note that every rational deliberative agent has in his subjective epistemic set a general interest in being factually informed. Assuming those interests to be in place in Michel’s

case, what is relevant is not the fact that Michel cannot *by his own lights at the present moment* traverse a sound deliberative route from the materials in his subjective epistemic set to the fine-forfeiting conclusion. Instead, what the internalist regards as relevant is whether the materials for traversing that route are in Michel's S, however much he is neglecting them at present.

The question I now want to press, the question I think holds the key to the proper understanding of Williams's internalism is this: why should the fact that some general interest, one not currently finding expression in the agent's practical thought and that, moreover, might never emerge from the shadows, make a relevant difference here? I suggest the motivation behind Williams's move here is the thought that if Michel does in some sense "have" that interest—and so we can understand his intellectual vices as obstacles to the expression of an interest that he in some sense "has" rather than as something lacking from S itself—it seems at least plausible to suppose that Michel is himself *capable* of being brought to appreciate that he should refrain from the fine-imposing conclusion; that is, that Michel is capable of appreciating it even if he does not here and now appreciate it in fact.³² The possibility that the presence of the general interest in his S apparently is intended to secure is the possibility that failing to refrain from the fine-imposing conclusion can be revealed to him as being *against reason* in the sense of being *against his reason*: it puts Michel in an inconsistent position as concerns his epistemic states, however opaque some of those states are to him at present. It is in this latter condition that Michel's epistemic irrationality in the matter of our traveler consists.

If this understanding of the implications of internalism for the case of reasons for belief is correct, then hastiness and illogicality in their guise as epistemic obstacles are two intellectual vices that the internalist can take on board as forms of epistemic irrationality. That is, the internalist may accept τ -REASON when the substitution instances for \wedge are hastiness and illogicality, understood in this way as obstacles and the substitution instances for A agents who possess the general interests in being factually and rationally correctly informed (as do all rational agents as such, on Williams's view).³³

Now, I said that my hope in turning to internalism about reasons for belief was to pump an intuition that it is apparently more difficult to pump in the case of reasons for acting, namely, that the existence of reasons that apply to an agent in a circumstance is not contingent on that agent's individual (be it practical or epistemic) psychology. In fact, however, one need not share that intuition in order to appreciate the ultimate lesson I wish to take from Michel's case. The lesson concerns the concept of epistemic rationality, understood as a standard of excellence for belief, that internalism supports and its connection with the

concept of a reason for belief. First, epistemic rationality as a standard of excellence for belief is on the internalist picture a thoroughly deliberator-relative standard, one that the deliberator succeeds in meeting so long as the proper relations hold between the elements in her subjective epistemic set and the conclusions she arrives at on their basis. Second, the reasons for belief entailed by a charge of epistemic irrationality (perhaps under one of its guises, such as hastiness or illogicality) are special: they are reasons to bring the elements of one's *E* in line with each other.³⁴ Also, because your access to the elements in your *E* is supposed to be secured by the fact that they are in your *E*, it is no mystery how such reasons concern you. In this way, a charge of irrationality as the internalist understands it purports to meet the challenge leveled at the externalist by the argument from reasons' advising function: it avoids the charges of bluff and browbeating. Furthermore, the reasons entailed by the charge of epistemic irrationality purportedly meet the explanatory challenge by explaining the changes in belief that they motivate.

But now note that on this picture the concept of epistemic irrationality is the concept of an unresponsiveness to reasons ultimately within one's power, given the contents of one's *E*, to avoid. The general point about reasons that Williams's internalism appears designed to support is that any legitimate criticism of deliberators as deliberators must be responsive to the forms of deliberation that are live possibilities for the person in question. If this is right, and we take "irrationality" as our central term of criticism, internalism supports a general, and plausible, thesis concerning when a charge of irrationality is legitimately leveled.

Internalism-Irrationality

A is irrational (with respect to a reason, *r*, for Φ -ing) if and only if there is a sound deliberative route A could traverse from the materials in his *E* to the conclusion to Φ (on the basis of *r*) and A remains on reflection unmotivated to Φ .

However plausible it may be to restrict epistemic irrationality, as a term of criticism, to failures to respond to reasons which failures it is within a deliberator's power, given the contents of his *E*, to avoid, Internalism-Irrationality does not on its own support Reason_{Belief}-Deliberative Route. That is, although it may plausibly follow from the fact that Michel is not capable of traversing a sound deliberative route from the materials in his *E* to the fine-forfeiting conclusion that Michel is not irrational in failing to assent to the fine-forfeiting conclusion, it is far more controversial to conclude on the basis of Michel's inability to traverse such a route that there is no reason for Michel to

assent to the fine-forfeiting conclusion.³⁵ Before turning to what more is needed, I'd like to return the discussion to the case of reasons for action.

3. The Deliberative Route and Reasons for Acting

Having explored internalism about reasons for belief and having drawn attention to a distinction in the role that the absence of a sound deliberative route plausibly plays in establishing an internalist thesis about irrationality and the role the internalist would have it play in more controversial theses that purport to substantively constrain our account of reasons as such, I want to return to Williams's example. Suppose we construct two scenarios for Mr. Elliot to match those we constructed for Michel.³⁶ In scenario A, Mr. Elliot wants to be a loving spouse but, due to a failure of *philia*, he cannot bring himself to do what that requires. For example, he cannot appreciate that it requires one to refrain from belittling one's wife for her aesthetic failings and so cannot appreciate that he has a reason to refrain from such belittlement. In scenario B, in contrast, Mr. Elliot is such that he fails to appreciate the value of being a loving spouse at all; so far as he can tell, none of the supposed evidence in fact tells in its favor. As one would expect, given his general miserliness, his understanding of what is required of one in the way of husbandry is inflexibly literal, and being master of his house is, so far as he is concerned, much easier when love does not complicate matters.

On the virtue-centered view of practical reasons appraisal, Msrs. Elliot A and B are relevantly similar to Msrs. Michel A and B in suffering from vices that undermine their responsiveness to reasons. As we saw in the Michel cases, the internalist was happy to grant that the relevant aretaic appraisal of Michel—whether in scenario A or B—was reason-entailing, that is, that Michel's vices did amount to responding deficiently with respect to reasons. Michel's hastiness and illogicality, recall, emerged on that picture as species of irrationality.

Given the similarity in the vices that plague Michel and Mr. Elliot, one might expect the internalist treatment of Elliot's reasons for action to parallel our earlier discussion. Such is not, however, the treatment Williams provides. Remarking on this fact, T. M. Scanlon recently has complained, with reference to his own analogue of Elliot, that it is unclear why the internalist treats cases such as Mr. Elliot as imagined in scenario A and Mr. Elliot as imagined in scenario B differently, given that it is true of each of them that similar deficiencies in dispositional elements in their respective S's prevent each of them from doing what the externalist claims they have reason to do. Here is Scanlon's take on the cases:

In cases like that of Mr. O'Brien (who was irredeemably confused about what gracious hospitality involves) [but who values being a gracious host], internalism seems to entail that a person can have a reason even though *he* will never recognize it as such (because of deficiencies in dispositional elements in his S). For it remains true that there is a sound deliberative route from elements of his S (a concern for hospitality) to the conclusion that he should behave differently. But suppose that Mr. O'Brien's son, O'Brien Jr., is incapable (because of deficiencies in his dispositions to respond) of recognizing that there is anything to be said for hospitality in the first place. Then in his case internalism seems to be committed to a different answer, namely that he has no reason to care about it if *he* could not reach that conclusion via a sound deliberative route from *his* S.³⁷

Now, I think Scanlon is right to be puzzled. Before pursuing the legitimate puzzlement with Williams's asymmetric treatment of apparently symmetrical cases, however, I want to note how, if what I argued in section 3 is correct, Scanlon misreads Williams's internalism. First, Scanlon is correct that in the case of Mr. O'Brien Sr. (his analogue of our Mr. Elliot in Scenario A), the internalist conclusion is that O'Brien has a reason to pursue what being a gracious host requires despite the fact that, due to his insensitivity, he will never recognize what is required as such. On the internalist view, Mr. O'Brien has this reason because he has in his S a general interest in being rationally correctly informed—for example, correctly informed as to the necessary means to one's desired ends. Given this general interest, the internalist concludes that Mr. O'Brien is *capable* of being brought round to acknowledge a reason to pursue the means to his ends even if he never *will* come around in fact. Mr. O'Brien is, by his own *best* lights, irrational in failing to pursue these means, however dimly his lights may continue to shine on them in fact. As we saw, this is precisely the treatment the internalist about belief afforded Michel. Scanlon, in contrast, has it that Mr. O'Brien has a reason to pursue the means necessary for being hospitable though he is *not* irrational in failing to recognize the reason. In saying this, Scanlon exhibits an even narrower understanding of irrationality than that I've ascribed to Williams: for Scanlon the paradigm case of irrationality is that of an agent whose judgment-sensitive attitudes are out of line with her own *explicit judgments* about the reasons that warrant them.³⁸

Note, next, that whereas Scanlon says that O'Brien Sr. *will* not light upon his reason, he notes that O'Brien Jr. *could* not. This is precisely the difference that provides fodder for the internalist's asymmetric treatment of the cases. Whereas it has been common to our cases of Michel and Mr. Elliot in scenario A that the possibility of a sound deliberative route to the relevant

reasons was secured by the contents of their subjective epistemic or motivational sets, in the case of O'Brien Jr. and Williams's original callous husband, we are to suppose that being kinder to one's wife hooks up with nothing in their S's. Their callousness marks not an obstacle to the expression of their true S's but, rather, something lacking in their S's themselves. If what I argued in section 3 is correct, Internalism-Irrationality supports the conclusion, which I suggested is a plausible one, that O'Brien Jr. is not irrational in failing to recognize a reason to be hospitable and neither is Mr. Elliot in scenario B irrational in failing to recognize reason to be nicer to his wife.

One way of understanding Scanlon's legitimate puzzlement, I suggest, is as a puzzlement concerning why, once we've conceded the relevance of the presence or absence of a sound deliberative route from a deliberator's S to conclusions about what to do or what to believe to assessments of his or her rationality, we haven't exhausted the relevance of the deliberative route to practical reasons appraisal. Why suppose that the presence or absence of such a route is pertinent to the question of what reasons there are?

It is time to take the additional step that I suggested in section 3 would be required for the internalist to earn her more controversial thesis (Reason-Deliberative Route).

4. Rational Ignorance of Reasons

We saw in section 3 that on my proposed interpretation of internalism it holds, plausibly, that a deliberator is not irrational if that deliberator (1) lacks the general interests that characterize rational deliberators as such (in which case, one is unable to traverse a sound deliberative route from S to the conclusion to believe that p, or to Φ , on the basis of r because one fails to be a candidate for rational deliberation at all); or (2) possesses the general interests in question, and so is able to deliberate (is a candidate for rational appraisal), but in the case at hand traversing a sound deliberative route from S to the conclusion to believe that p, or to Φ , on the basis of r is for that deliberator not a possibility. This reading of the internalist's understanding of practical irrationality has the benefit of explaining how it is natural for the internalist to take such criticism to be the only non-browbeating form of disapprobation with respect to practical appraisal. A form of criticism escapes the charge of browbeating only if it can serve an advising function and this it can do only if the deficiency it marks is one it is possible for the target's criticism to avoid.

I further argued that even granting that this is a plausible account of our concept of irrationality, it in itself does not support the stronger conclusion that the internalist appears

concerned to draw: the conclusion that one is not failing to recognize a reason, r , if (1) or (2) is true of one with respect to r . This is the conclusion that follows from Reason-Deliberative Route.

There is, however, a common path through the heuristic of the deliberative route to both Internalism-Irrationality and to Reason-Deliberative Route. That path proceeds from the familiar principle that ought implies can. Indeed, one way of understanding the first premise of the argument from explanation is as an implicit appeal to that principle. The principle likewise was at work in our argument for the plausibility of Internalism-Irrationality, an argument that turned on a slightly veiled assumption that the central principle of practical reason must be such that the minimally competent deliberator is capable of honoring it. From here, the internalist must suppose, it is but a small step to the conclusion that any and all practical reasons must be such that the competent deliberator is capable of acting for them. Once that step is made, moreover, it results that not just the charge of irrationality is capability entailing; all true statements that A has a reason to Φ turn out to be capability entailing.

With this conclusion, I suggest, we reach the real substance of the constraint that the internalist would impose on reasons and with it, the internalist motivation for denying V-REASON in a pluralist form. If criticism of an agent's responsiveness (or lack thereof) to reasons is bona fide reasons appraisal only if it is capability entailing and aretaic appraisal is not capability entailing, then aretaic appraisal is not bona fide reasons appraisal.

The proponent of the virtue-centered view of practical reasons appraisal faces, then, the following options: we retain the principle that ought implies can and reject V-REASON on its pluralist interpretation. The price is then to offer some account of the other vices as deficiencies (which William himself readily concedes them to be) but as deficiencies that are conceptually distinct from deficiencies with respect to the appreciation of practical reasons.

Alternatively, we can reject the principle that ought implies can. Although I cannot fully debate the merits of the principle here (though I invite you to consider how plausible you find it as a constraint in the case of reasons for belief), the costs of this alternative for the proponent of the virtue-centered view of practical reasons appraisal are not too high. The virtue-centered view of practical reasons appraisal refuses to give the principle a place at the level of the reasons entailed by the aretaic appraisal in question. So, for example, a person is appropriately deemed unjust if, *inter alia*, she fails to respond to the reasons there are for recognizing the undefeated rights of others to their due—and this regardless of whether the person's unjust char-

acter incapacitates her with respect to such reasons. We thereby understand aretaic appraisal to be reason entailing without being capability entailing *with regard to the reason entailed*. However, breaking the conceptual connection between aretaic appraisal and what the agent to whom it is directed has it within her power to do does not mute questions concerning what a deliberator is capable of. Indeed, it is arguably a *strength* of the virtue-centered view that it brings important questions to bear on the presence or absence of an agent's deliberative possibilities themselves. Whereas the internalist's interest in the presence or absence of a deliberative route to a conclusion ends with an answer to the question whether a particular agent is able to traverse it, the virtue-centered view attends to the extent to which the absence of a traversable sound deliberative route from the agent's S to the conclusion is itself an appropriate object of appraisal. To hint in the direction where this thought might lead: it should make a difference to our assessment of Mr. Elliot—to our assessment of *him*, not of the reasons that apply to him—were we to discover that he had been properly bought up in conditions of gender equality. (Compare how our assessment—again, of him, not of the reasons that apply to him—would change were we to discover that he had never been exposed to anyone, other perhaps than his wife, who was not sexist). In either case the reason-entailing aretaic appraisal of Mr. Elliot as callous or miserly or some such is in place; with respect to its application, the circumstances of Mr. Elliot's vice are neither here nor there. Which is not to say that they go missing once we turn to the further question of how responsible, if at all, he is for his lamentable incapacity.³⁹

Conclusion

I have argued that the internalist's case against V-REASON in what I called its pluralist form is guilty of conflating claims about practical rationality and claims about practical reasons. That case attempts to proceed from what I suggested is an arguably plausible thesis concerning when one is irrational in failing to Φ (Internalism-Irrationality) to a thesis concerning the existence of reasons for action (Reason-Deliberative Route) that we should resist. Although the source of the doubts I raised relies on an analogy between reasons for action and reasons for belief, Williams's internalist appears committed to treating the cases analogously. With one path to internalism about practical reasons blocked, I suggested that a more direct path ultimately might motivate the internalist to Reason-Deliberative Route: the path that runs through an appeal to the principle that ought implies can.

In response to the more direct path, I suggested that the proponent of the virtue-centered view of practical reasons

appraisal should concede an internalist understanding of *practical irrationality* while continuing to resist the conclusion that such an understanding commits one to an internalist understanding of *practical reasons*. Finally, I explained why the fact that such resistance comes at the cost of denying that the aretaic “ought” implies that the agent to whom the appraisal applies can act for the reasons at issue is not too high a cost.

What, however, of the supposed incompatibility of the virtue-centered account of practical reason with reasons’ explanatory and advising functions? First, I think it should come as no embarrassment to the virtue-centered view if the reasons that are its concern—the reasons of the just and the generous, the honest and the benevolent—have a limited explanatory potential in explaining only the actions of those who act well. Why suppose that the status of the fact that Φ -ing would senselessly cause the suffering of the simple and poor as a reason against Φ -ing requires that it could be *Mr. Elliot’s* reason for refraining from Φ -ing on a particular occasion? The ability of such reasons to explain Mr. Elliot’s actions is precisely what Mr. Elliot, in his vice, foregoes.

What of the virtue-centered view’s consequences for the advising function of reasons? Not only is such a view faced with the apparent incoherence of telling agents that there is reason to do that which they may have no motivation to do, it also faces the apparent incoherence of telling them that they have reason to do what it may be irrational for them to do.⁴⁰ Much here depends on our understanding of those practices of advising. It is striking that the most commonplace context of that practice, the context of advising the young, goes missing from the internalist’s favored examples. When we tell a child that she mustn’t make fun of Johnny’s stammer because it is unkind and explain the forthcoming query about kindness by explaining that such ridicule hurts Johnny’s feelings, we convey to her that kindness requires a sensitivity to the consideration that another might legitimately feel hurt by her words. In adducing this fact, we are drawing her attention to a consideration we expect her to recognize as a reason for regulating her actions (and other judgment-sensitive attitudes) in a certain way. Thus do we instill our initial lessons in kindness. Now, anyone with any experience with children will be quite skeptical of the suggestion that in so advising a child we purport to appeal to something in the child’s subjective motivational set. Insofar as a child has a subjective motivational set, it is likely to be quite egoistically permeated indeed. Hence, the familiar alternative: How would you like it if Johnny did that to you. To rely solely on such egocentric appeals, however, is a recipe for inviting the eventual response: “But Mama, I wouldn’t care.” A retreat into browbeating (“Because I say so!”) is not the only alternative to such egoistic appeals. (Neither, I suspect most

parents would agree, are children's commonplace appeals to their subjective motivational sets—"Because I want to!"—granted the status of even defeasible reasons in such contexts.) The parent concerned to raise a kind child takes such opportunities to teach the import of recognizing Johnny's hurt feelings as a reason for refraining from teasing, however long an explanation of the value of being a kind person itself might be in coming.

To be sure, things are different in the more philosophically familiar case of adults. When we first engage the Michels and Mr. Elliot's of the world, pointing out that they have reason to let us go on our merry way or to be nicer to their spouses, we approach them, optimistically perhaps, as decent folk—those to whom we expect such considerations to speak. When that optimism proves unwarranted, then it *does* become browbeating (though not bluff) merely to repeat that they have reason to act as it is now clear they have no motivation act. In the face of such a recalcitrant character, the significance of the etiology of an agent's deliberative deficiency comes to the fore. If we suppose that the deficiency is due to extenuating circumstances and no fault of the agent's own, our reasons claim may take on the character of a lament: this is what one should do here and why, pity you can't appreciate it. Led to believe that the ignorance is culpable, our reasons claim may well come to issue a protest. In neither case, however, does the resulting inefficacy of saying what we do detract from the truth of what is said.⁴¹ So much the worse for the vicious that they cannot recognize that truth for what it is. As Forster concludes his reflections on Mr. Elliot: "God alone knows how far we are in the grip of our bodies. He alone can judge how far the cruelty of Mr. Elliot was the outcome of extenuating circumstances. But Mrs. Elliot could accurately judge of its extent."⁴²

Notes

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¹ The passage continues:

He married a girl whose voice was beautiful. There was no caress in it, yet all who heard it were soothed, as though the world held some unexpected blessing. She called to her dogs one night over invisible waters, and he, a tourist up on the bridge, thought "that is extraordinarily adequate." In time he discovered that her figure, face, and thoughts were adequate also, and as she was not impossible socially, he married her...

Things only went right for a little time. Though beautiful without and within, Mrs. Elliot had not the gift of making her home beautiful; and one day, when she bought a carpet for the dining-room that clashed, he laughed gently, said he “really couldn’t,” and departed. (E. M. Forster, *The Longest Journey*, ed. Elizabeth Heine [New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1984], chapter 2, p. 22)

² Some philosophers recently have suggested that we court controversy even sooner, that is, as soon as we suppose that there are such things as genuinely explanatory traits of character to serve as the referents of the various virtue and vice terms. See, for example, Gilbert Harman, “Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 99 (1999): 315–33, and John Doris, *Lack of Character* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Addressing these arguments is outside the scope of my concerns here. For a response, see Rachana Kamtekar, “Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character,” *Ethics* 114 (2004): 458–91.

³ “*Inter alia*” marks the fact that it is not only actions that the virtuous agent regulates in accordance with the reasons that apply to her; she regulates other judgment-sensitive attitudes, including certain emotions, with an eye to reasons, as well.

⁴ Although I cannot argue this here, these everyday appearances survive philosophical scrutiny, which does well to proceed from reflection on the fact that a theory of ethical virtue and a theory of practical reason each takes as its formal object acting well, in a sense intended *sans phrase* (that is, in the sense that each lays claim to an unqualified sense of “should” as applied to what one should do in various circumstances of choice). Such reflection lends support to what I elsewhere have dubbed “The Univocality Thesis,” the thesis that the correct theory of practical reason and the correct theory of ethical virtue agree in substance in their account of what an agent must do to act well in the circumstances. If the Univocality Thesis is true, then evaluations of agents in terms of ethical virtue (and vice) just are, *inter alia*, evaluations of them as practical reasoners. My aim here is not to offer a positive argument in support of the Univocality Thesis but, rather, to consider one influential line of argument against it.

⁵ I argue in “Vindicating Virtue: Acting Virtuously, Acting Rationally, and Acting Well” (under review) that such a reply fails when the theory of practical reason on offer is desire-based instrumentalism.

⁶ Williams, “Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame,” in his *Making Sense of Humanity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 39.

⁷ For the understanding of the opponent position on which it claims that such a man is irrational, see Williams’s “Internal and External Reasons,” reprinted in his *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 110. In “Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame,” the formulation of the opposing view that follows Williams’s acknowledgement that we appropriately say such a person is ungrateful, and so on, is in terms of his having a reason to be nicer. See p. 39.

As I discuss below, one can maintain that such a man has a reason to be nicer to his wife without maintaining that in failing to act on such a reason the man thereby reveals himself to be practically

irrational. For now, I simply note the possibility. I further discuss this possibility in *Moral Virtue and Reasons for Action* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 2001). J. David Velleman explores the possibility of a rational act being performed by an irrational agent in the context of a reading of Kantianism in ethics in his "Willing the Law," *Practical Conflicts: New Philosophical Essays*, ed. Monika Betzler and Peter Baumann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 27–56. Although Velleman suggests my view is similar to his view that a rational act might be performed by an irrational agent, I now prefer to say that an agent can act rationally despite being a kind of agent that there is reason not to be.

⁸ Judith Jarvis Thomson endorses an understanding of irrationality in belief as a form of self-contradiction but balks at its extension to the case of action (*Goodness and Advice* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001], 79). Scanlon allows such an extension to the case of action, intention, and other of what he calls "judgment-sensitive attitudes." On Scanlon's view, an agent is practically irrational just in case her judgment-sensitive attitudes do not correspond with her considered judgments about the reasons that bear on them. See Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 25–30.

⁹ Williams, "Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame," in *Making Sense of Humanity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 35–45. Cf.: "The central idea is that if B can say truly of A that A has a reason to Φ , then (leaving aside the qualifications needed because it may not be his strongest reason) there must be a sound deliberative route to Φ -ing which starts from A's existing motivations" (Williams, "Replies" in *World, Mind, Ethics*, ed. J. E. J. Altham and Ross Harrison [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], 186).

¹⁰ For example, Williams suggests such a formulation in "Internal and External Reasons," 109. Note that I intend r to refer to a consideration whose content need not itself include the concept of a reason.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹² "Internal and External Reasons," 106. Cf.: "If it is true that A has a reason to Φ , then it must be possible that he should Φ for that reason; and if he does act for that reason, then that reason will be the explanation of his acting" ("Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame," 39).

¹³ "Internal and External Reasons," 106–07.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ "Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame," 39–40.

²¹ Christine Korsgaard, "Skepticism about Practical Reason," *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986): 5–25.

²² We can now see why the internalism constraint on reasons for acting motivates a rejection of v -REASON: v -REASON suggests that aretaic appraisal is reason entailing independently of considerations concerning the subjective motivational set of the agent who is the object of appraisal. In Williams's terms, in short, the virtue-centered theory of practical reason is one species of external reasons theory.

²³ An analogy with the case of theoretical reason likewise is exploited by, among others, Elijah Millgram in arguing against Williams's internalism. See Elijah Millgram, "Williams' Argument Against External Reasons," *Noûs* 30, 2 (1996): 197–220. Millgram and I pursue the analogy in quite different directions. See also John McDowell, "Might There Be External Reasons," in *World, Mind, Ethics*, and J. David Velleman, "The Possibility of Practical Reason," in his collection of that title (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²⁴ Such a principle might find support among certain philosophers drawn to so-called virtue epistemology.

²⁵ As Peter Railton notes, "On the usual view of things, two agents in the same epistemic situation (same evidence, same background beliefs) would have the same reasons for believing any given proposition regardless of possible differences in their personal goals" ("On the Hypothetical and Non-hypothetical in Reasoning about Belief and Action," in his *Facts, Values, and Norms* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003], 293–321).

²⁶ It is worth noting that the acknowledgement of an asymmetry can cut the other way, that is, that once the possibility of external reasons is granted in the case of belief, certain metaphysical and motivational costs whose price in the case of reasons for action was supposed to be too high have already been paid.

²⁷ I have in mind commentators who suppose that the kind of correction to an agent's S that Williams is willing to make in earning a truly normative conception of reasons involves abstracting away from the agent's S so as to bring it into closer alignment to some external standard. I discuss this, to my mind mistaken, interpretation of Williams below.

²⁸ Scanlon at times appears to understand Williams in this way. See his "Appendix" in *What We Owe to Each Other*.

²⁹ "Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame," 37.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

³² Others have argued for an understanding of internalism about reasons for acting on which its conception of practical irrationality attributes irrationality to A in doing Φ only if A could be legitimately expected not to Φ . This suggests that the relevant sense of capacity at issue here be spelled out in terms of what it would be legitimate (in a normative, not statistical sense) for one to expect of Michel, *so far as Φ -ing is concerned*. Although I cannot take up the argument here, my position accepts different conditions of (normative) legitimacy. See, by way of contrast, Keiran Setiya, "Against Internalism," *Nous* 38, 2: 266–98. For one, I reject Setiya's claim that philosophical ignorance might constitute an excuse from the (normatively) legitimate expectation that an agent recognize certain classes of reasons, among them so-called moral reasons.

³³ It will have occurred to those sympathetic to externalism to object that the ascription of the general interests in question to Michel is *ad hoc*. On what basis, after all, do we ascribe to Michel such general interests? Presumably, we can do so if we have reason to believe that his incapacity is a local, as opposed to a global, one. Were the incapacity global, the correct conclusion in Michel's case would be that he is not a candidate for rational appraisal at all. After all, Michel happily embraces his disdain for the niceties of argument. That his reasoning

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is “illogical,” recall, does not function for him as a form of criticism. Perhaps, someone will respond, such thoughts don’t accurately reflect our baggage agent’s *considered* view. The correct retort here, it seems to me, is that Michel *does not have* considered views—that is precisely his problem. Even waiving that retort, and supposing we equip Michel with a modicum of reflection, the attribution of such an interest is rendered no less *ad hoc*. That is, waiving the objection that it would be out of character for Michel to reflect on his illogical predicament does nothing to mute the fact that *were* Michel able to reflect in the requisite manner, it would be quite in character for that reflection to culminate in a rather Whitmanesque conclusion. “Contradiction?” our now reflective baggage agent responds to the next philosophy grad student to pass his way, “I am large, I contain multitudes!”

But now note again that the internalist is committed to saying in this case that neither does Michel go “against reason” in ignoring the reasons there are. One may well wonder what kind of deficiency hastiness and illogicality understood in this way can be if not a deficiency with respect to recognizing reasons and following where they lead. For now, I’ll simply note that the upshot of this dialectic is that a-rationality emerges on the internalist view as a term of criticism that is not reason entailing, a conclusion at odds with the status of rationality as a standard of excellence.

³⁴ John Broome suggests that what I am here referring to as reasons are best understood in terms of normative requirements that, if he is correct, need have nothing to do with reasons at all. To take one of Broome’s examples: willing an end normatively requires you to will what you believe to be the necessary means to the end. The normative requirement stands independently of whether or not you have a reason to will the end; and in the absence of such a reason, the normative requirement says nothing about whether you have a reason to will the means. See John Broome, “Normative Requirements,” *Ratio* 12 (1999): 398–419. In terms of Broome’s distinction, my proposal becomes the proposal that appraisal of agents in terms of their rationality is appraisal of them with respect to normative requirements, not with respect to reasons. But then if the excellence that is practical rationality is not concerned with reasons for action (but rather with normative requirements), the theory of practical rationality cannot be the whole of a theory of practical reason. Williams’s internalism conflates the two.

³⁵ Again, it would follow from the fact that *there is no sound deliberative route to the conclusion* that no epistemic reasons support the conclusion. But this, I suggest, is to accept an external standard of justification that Williams does not embrace.

³⁶ These scenarios resemble two discussed by Scanlon, those of Msrs. O’Brien Sr. and Jr. See Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, Appendix, 366ff.

³⁷ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, Appendix, 369.

³⁸ See Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 25.

³⁹ To be sure, even the callous husband is not incapable of behaving better toward his wife. And we might bring him to do so by appealing to reasons that speak in favor of his so acting. Perhaps the consideration that he thereby avoids prosecution for spousal abuse will suffice. What his particular incapacity precludes is his treating his wife better for reasons such as those that motivate the loving spouse.

⁴⁰ The proponent of the virtue-centered view of practical reasons appraisal thus inherits Thomson's problem about advice: "[H]ow can it be thought coherent to advise Alfred to pay his grocer's bill in the words "You ought to pay it, though I grant that your paying it would be irrational"? See Thomson, *Goodness and Advice*, 77–8.

⁴¹ I take Scanlon to be correct, that is, to point out that the fact that this would be browbeating in the context does not entail that what is said is not true. See Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 372.

⁴² Forster, *The Longest Journey*, chapter 2, p. 26.