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*Abstract*

Moral Rationalism is the view that if an act is morally required then it is what there is most reason to do. It is often assumed that the truth of Moral Rationalism is dependent on some version of The Overridingness Thesis, the view that moral reasons override nonmoral reasons. However, as Douglas Portmore has pointed out, the two can come apart; we can accept Moral Rationalism without accepting any version of The Overridingness Thesis. Nevertheless, The Overridingness Thesis serves as one of two possible explanations for Moral Rationalism. In this paper I will investigate which of these two explanations a moral rationalist should accept. I will argue that when we properly attend to the form of Moral Rationalism supported by the intuitions that motivate the view, we are left with no reason to accept The Overridingness Thesis.

**Introduction**

Suppose that on my way to an important job interview I find a lost child. I realize that I could help the child find her parents but that this might make me late for my interview. In this case it seems reasonable to think that, morally, I ought to help the child, despite the fact that I have a strong self-interested reason not to do so. While not everyone has faced such a dilemma, we all may find ourselves in situations where what we morally ought to do clashes with acts favoured by other kinds of reasons. When faced with such a situation we must ask ourselves what we have most reason to

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do, all things considered.<sup>1</sup> It is commonly claimed that in cases of conflict such as this, moral reasons override other types of reason, meaning that we always have most reason to perform the act favoured by morality. This view is called The Overridingness Thesis (hereafter, ‘Overridingness’). A closely related view is that we always have most reason to act in line with our moral requirements. This view is called Moral Rationalism (hereafter, ‘Rationalism’).

These two views are important in their own right because accepting either view will have consequences for our everyday decision-making. If we accept Overridingness then we should accept that when faced with a dilemma like the one above we ought to perform the act favoured by morality. If we accept Rationalism then we accept that if we are morally required to help the child in the above case then this is what we have most reason to do. These views also have important implications for other debates in Moral Philosophy. Accepting Overridingness or Rationalism could provide resources for showing why we ought to act morally. If either is true, then we can say that acting in line with our moral requirements is what we have most reason, all things considered, to do. These views also have implications for ‘The Demandingness Objection’ that is commonly raised against standard forms of Consequentialism.<sup>2</sup> It is argued that consequentialist views generate moral requirements that make unreasonable demands of moral agents. However, as a number of authors have pointed out, this objection has little force unless we accept some form of Overridingness or Rationalism.<sup>3</sup> Finally, Rationalism is also thought to have

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<sup>1</sup> Note that in this paper I will use ‘reasons’ to refer to objective reasons.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1981, Originally Published in 1907) pp.87, 434, 492.

<sup>3</sup> See Portmore, previously cited, p.26-27, Dale Dorsey, ‘Weak Anti-Rationalism and the Demands of Morality,’ *Nous* 46 (2012) pp. 1-23, Attila Tanyi ‘The Case for Authority,’ In S. Schleidgen (Ed.) *Should We Always Act Morally? Essays on Overridingness* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2012) pp. 159–189.

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implications for the debate about whether there is an internal connection between moral judgements and motivation. It is claimed that if Rationalism is true rational agents will be motivated by their moral judgements.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the importance of both views there has been surprisingly little discussion of the relationship between the two theses. In fact, confusion about the differences between the two is common. Sometimes a view is described as one and labeled as the other. Sarah Stroud, for example, defines Overridingness in the following way, “If S is morally required to  $\phi$ , then S has most reason to  $\phi$ .”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Samuel Schleffer defines ‘the claim of overridingness’ in the following way, “It can never be rational knowingly to do what morality forbids.”<sup>6</sup> These views are versions of Rationalism not Overridingness, as they say nothing about whether the moral reasons have overridden other reasons. My aim in this paper will be to clarify the difference between the two views and then to show that the considerations that count in favour of Rationalism provide no support for Overridingness. I will start, in §1, by clarifying the differences between the two views. In §2 I will look at the three important intuitions that are often appealed to by those seeking to defend Rationalism. In §3 I will show that there are two possible readings of Rationalism, a de dicto reading and a de re reading and that only the former is supported by the intuitions considered in §2. In §4 I will argue that the de dicto version does not provide any support for Overridingness.

Before I begin, it is worth making clear four assumptions that I will be making in this paper. First, in order for either view to be an interesting claim it needs to be assumed that there is a genuine distinction to be made between moral and nonmoral reasons.

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<sup>4</sup> See Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem*, (Oxford: Blackwell ,1994) pp. 61-62 and Mark Van Roojen ‘Moral Rationalism and Rational Amoralism,’ *Ethics* 120 (2010) pp. 495-525.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Moral Overridingness and Moral Theory,’ *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 79 (1998) pp. 170-189.

<sup>6</sup> *Human Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) p.53.

Without this assumption, the claims are trivial.<sup>7</sup> This rules out two kinds of justification for Rationalism or Overridingness. The first justification holds that all normative reasons are properly understood as moral reasons. The second is one that holds that what we ought morally to do is fully determined by what we ought to do from a self-interested point of view. Of course, this does not mean that these views are not interesting or defensible.

In addition, I will be assuming that moral and nonmoral reasons can conflict with one another; that the balance of moral reasons can support performing an act while the balance of nonmoral reasons can oppose the act's performance. This assumption needs to be made in order for Overridingness to be an open possibility.<sup>8</sup> If moral reasons never conflict with nonmoral reasons then neither will ever overriding the other. We do not, though, need to make this assumption in order to hold Rationalism, if these two kinds of reasons never conflict then its truth is guaranteed, as what there is most moral reason to do will not conflict with any opposing reasons.<sup>9</sup> However, for the purposes of this paper I will assume that these two kinds of reason can conflict in order to show that accepting Rationalism does not give us reason to accept Overridingness even if we make this assumption.

The third assumption that needs to be made is that moral and nonmoral reasons are commensurable. In order to ask whether moral requirements always determine what there is most reason to do we must assume that there is some way of comparing moral requirements with other kinds of normative reasons or requirements. Otherwise it will not make sense to say that one always overrides the other. This view is not universally

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<sup>7</sup> This point is made by Schleffer, *ibid*, p.54.

<sup>8</sup> Thanks to Mike Ridge useful discussion here.

<sup>9</sup> This point is made by Portmore, previously cited, p.39 fn.32.

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accepted but any version of either view that assumes that the two kinds of reason can conflict will have to make this assumption, so this is an acceptable assumption to make here.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, I will be assuming that Rationalism is a necessity claim. This does not need to be assumed in order to accept the view. We might hold that it is a contingent, empirical truth rather than a necessary truth. I take it, though, that this is not what those who subscribe to Rationalism for the reasons I will examine in §2 have in mind.

### **§1 Moral Rationalism and Moral Overridingness**

In this section I will explain the difference between Rationalism and Overridingness. First we must explain what is meant by ‘overridingness’. To say that one kind of reason always overrides another is to say that when the two conflict, the first kind of reason will always defeat the other relative to some normative standpoint. As the standpoint we are interested in is the all things considered standpoint, we can define the relevant kind of overridingness as follows:

*Rational Overridingness:* One kind of reason, m, rationally overrides another, n, if and only if from an all things considered normative perspective, m reasons always defeat all n reasons in terms of importance or normative strength.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For arguments against the possibility of an all things considered point of view see Sidgwick, previously cited, p. 508 and David Copp ‘The Ring of Gyges: Overridingness and the Unity of Reason’ *Social Philosophy and Policy* 14 (1997) pp. 86 – 106. Derek Parfit, responds to Sidgwick’s argument in his *On What Matters Volume 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Ch. 6. For a reply to Copp see Owen McLeod, ‘Just Plain Ought,’ *Journal of Ethics* 5 (2001) pp. 269 – 291.

<sup>11</sup> Similar definitions of ‘overridingness’ are given by Copp, previously cited, p.90, Portmore, previously cited, p.39, and Seana Valentine Shiffrin, ‘Moral Overridingness and Moral Subjectivism,’ *Ethics* 109 (1999) pp.772-794 at p. 773.

We are interested in whether moral reasons override other normative reasons. We can define one version of this view as follows:

*Strong Overridingness:* From an all things considered normative perspective, moral reasons always override all nonmoral reasons.<sup>12</sup>

However, we might think that not all moral reasons are rationally overriding. Perhaps when we have a choice between a supererogatory act, one that is beyond the call of duty, and a morally permissible, non-obligatory alternative then the moral reasons that support performing the supererogatory act are not rationally overriding.<sup>13</sup> For instance, if I can sacrifice my life to save someone else's then we might think there is moral reason to do so but that this reason is not rationally overriding. We can, though, accept this but still hold the following weaker version of Overridingness.

*Weak Overridingness:* From an all things considered normative perspective, the reasons that support or are provided by moral requirements always override all nonmoral reasons.

Weak Overridingness covers two possible views. We might think that moral requirements provide conclusive reasons while other moral reasons do not.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Kurt Baier defends this view (using the term 'superior' rather than 'overriding'), in his *The Moral Point of View* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958), p.99. Others who define OT in terms of reasons include, Portmore, previously cited, p.40 and Tanyi, previously cited, p.167.

<sup>13</sup> This point is made by Huntington Terrell (though he does not use the term 'supererogatory') in his 'Are Moral Considerations Morally Overriding?' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 47 (1969), pp.51-60, at pp.52-53 and also by Stephen Darwall in his 'Morality and Practical Reason: A Kantian Approach,' In David Copp (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp.282-320 at p. 286.

<sup>14</sup> This version of Weak Overridingness is endorsed by David O. Brink who claims that moral requirements *provide* overriding reasons for action in his, 'Kantian Rationalism: Inescapability, Authority, and Supremacy,' In G. Cullity and B. Gaut (Eds.) *Ethics and Practical Reason* (Oxford:

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Alternatively, we might think that it is the reasons that support moral obligations that override all nonmoral reasons.<sup>15</sup>

Weak Overridingness seems superficially similar to the following view:

*Moral Rationalism*: If an act,  $\phi$ , is morally required then, from an all things considered normative perspective,  $\phi$ -ing is what there is most reason to do.<sup>16</sup>

However, there is an important difference between the two. Weak Overridingness says that the reasons that support or are provided by moral requirements always override all nonmoral reasons. Rationalism, on the other hand, makes no mention of what explains why we have decisive reason to act in line with our moral requirements nor does it state that morality is of greater normative importance than other normative considerations.

In addition to these views being similar, the acceptance of Overridingness provides an explanation for Rationalism. If we accept that either version of Overridingness is a necessary truth and we think that moral requirements are fully determined by what we have most moral reason to do then we should also accept Rationalism. According to such a view, moral requirements will always be what agents have most reason to do.

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Oxford University Press, 1997) p.256, and Darwall in *The Second Person Standpoint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.26.

<sup>15</sup> This possibility is considered by Darwall in his, 'Morality and Practical Reason', p. 286 and also by Stephen Schlothfeldt and Stephen Schweitzer in their, 'Is Morality Overriding?' In *Should We Always Act Morally?* pp. 65-88.

<sup>16</sup> To ensure that acts of supererogation are not against the balance of reasons we could change this definition to 'either  $\phi$ -ing or its supererogatory alternative is what there is most reason to do', as Shiffrin does, previously cited, p.773. The question of how to reconcile Moral Rationalism with supererogation is not one I will investigate here.

The question I will be considering is whether the reverse applies. Does accepting Rationalism give us any reason to accept some version of Overridingness? One way in which it would is if Overridingness provided the only possible explanation for Rationalism. Stephen Darwall seems to suggest that this is the case in the following:

Reasons provided by moral oughts might be invariably supreme because they are guaranteed to *override* other normative reasons, because they invariably *defeat* (that is reduce or undermine the force of) other reasons, or through some combination of the two.<sup>17</sup>

It is not important, for my purposes, whether moral reasons defeat other normative reasons by simply exceeding them in normative force or by the more complicated method of ‘defeating’ that Darwall mentions here, as both count as versions of Overridingness. The important point is that Darwall seems to claim that accepting what he calls ‘supremacy’, the view that moral obligations provide conclusive reasons for action, pushes us towards thinking that some form of Weak Overridingness is true. Darwall makes a similar point elsewhere when he moves from the claim that, ‘it can never be rational to do what morality forbids,’ to the claim that, ‘moral obligations always *give* agents conclusive reasons for acting that outweigh or take priority over any potentially competing considerations.’<sup>18</sup> This thought, that the explanation for Rationalism will come from some version of Overridingness may also explain why, as mentioned previously, some philosophers have applied the label ‘The Overridingness Thesis’ to views that are really forms of Rationalism.

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<sup>17</sup> ‘Morality and Practical Reason,’ pp. 286-287.

<sup>18</sup> *Second Person*, p.26. Emphasis added.



However, Overridingness does not provide the only explanation for Rationalism. It is possible to accept Rationalism without accepting either version of Overridingness. If the following constraint on what can be counted as a moral requirement is taken as a necessity claim then we have an explanation that does not appeal to either form of Overridingness:

*The Constraint Thesis (Constraint):* if an act,  $\phi$ , is not what there is most reason to do then  $\phi$ -ing is not morally required.

This is not a version of Overridingness. According to Constraint, Rationalism is explained by the fact that unless an act is in line with what the agent has most reason to do then it cannot be morally required. It is important to be clear how this view differs from Weak Overridingness. It would be easy to think that Constraint tells us that in order to be counted as a reason that makes an act morally required, that reason must always override all non-moral reasons. This, though, would be a mistake. Constraint does not say that any moral reasons will always take priority over non-moral reasons in situations where the two conflict. It merely states that it is a necessary condition for moral requirements that they are what we have most reason to do, all things considered.

Overridingness and Constraint provide two different explanations for Rationalism. The view that Rationalism should be viewed as a constraint is not unique to me, it is also held by Douglas Portmore. Interestingly, despite having a different view of Rationalism to Darwall, Portmore's defence of the view rests on an argument given

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by Darwall.<sup>19</sup> While Portmore uses this argument to support the truth of Rationalism he does not show that this argument provides equal support for both his and Darwall's versions of the view. This is important, as we might think that the reason that Darwall, and others, accept Weak Overridingness is that the arguments given to support Rationalism push us to understand it in this way. It is this thought that I will investigate in this paper.

Portmore does not address this thought. His argument for accepting Constraint is that this is the form of Rationalism that we are pushed towards if we reject both Strong Overridingness and the claim that moral reasons are morally overriding.<sup>20</sup> My defence of Constraint will take a more direct approach. I will argue that it is Constraint and not Overridingness that is supported by the intuitions commonly appealed to by those seeking to defend Rationalism, and that both Darwall and Portmore's arguments depend on. If successful then I will have provided an argument in support of viewing Rationalism as a constraint that does not depend on the arguments Portmore gives against Strong Overridingness and the moral overridingness of moral reasons. I will start by looking at the intuitions that are commonly appealed to in support of Rationalism. I will then argue that these intuitions support Constraint and not Overridingness.

## **§2 Why accept Moral Rationalism?**

There are three intuitions that are commonly appealed to in support of Rationalism. In this section I will motivate these intuitions and show why they provide support for

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<sup>19</sup> Portmore, *Commonsense Consequentialism*, 42-51. Darwall gives the argument in *Second Person*, pp.96-99, See also John Skorupski *Ethical Explorations*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.170-171.

<sup>20</sup> *Commonsense Consequentialism*, pp.41-42.

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Rationalism. I will not attempt to provide a conclusive defence of Rationalism. My aim is the more modest one of showing that those who accept it for the reasons commonly given in support of the view are not thereby given any reason to accept some form of Overridingness.

The first intuition that is commonly appealed to in support of Rationalism is that moral requirements place rational constraints on our actions. If someone has a moral obligation to act in a particular way then we do not think that she is free to choose how to act. Rather, we think that she has most reason to do what is morally required. Those who think that I have a moral obligation to help the lost child rather than attend the job interview would likely also think that this settles the question of what I have most reason to do. As many have pointed out, this point seems to be presupposed by our practice of blaming those who freely and knowledgably act wrongly.<sup>21</sup> We think it appropriate to blame those who freely and knowledgably perform a wrong act. To be blameworthy, though, it seems reasonable to think that we must judge that the agent did not have sufficient reason to act as she did. It would, after all, be odd to blame me for failing to help the child while acknowledging that this is what I had most reason to do. In order for blame to be appropriate, then, we must think that by violating a moral requirement the agent acted against the balance of reasons. If we accept these two claims then we can conclude that if an act is morally required it must be an act that the agent had most reason to perform.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> This point is made by Darwall, *Second Person*, p.97, Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), p.299, Portmore, previously cited, p.43, Shafer-Landau, previously cited, p.192, Stroud, previously cited, p.176 and Bernard Williams *Making Sense of Humanity and Other Philosophical Papers 1982-1993* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.40-44.

<sup>22</sup> This is a simplified version of the argument given by Portmore, previously cited, p.43-44 and Darwall, *Second Person*, pp.95-99.

The second intuition is that moral requirements provide a rational justification for action.<sup>23</sup> If we accept that an act is morally required then there does not seem to be any need to give a further rational justification for performing that act. Imagine that Alice tells Jack that he has a moral obligation to donate ten per cent of his or her income to charity. The next day Jack tells Alice that he has made this donation. Now imagine that in response Alice accuses Jack of acting against the balance of reasons. I think most people would agree that this would be a strange thing for Alice to say. Assuming that Alice's views have not changed, we would think that Alice is guilty of some kind of confusion, insincerity or irrationality. The reason why we would think this is that if an act is morally required then this seems to be all that is needed in order to rationally justify performing it. Rationalism provides the perfect explanation for this intuition. The reason why moral requirements serve as rational justifiers is that moral requirements are always in line with what we have most reason to do.

The third intuition is that demonstrating that an act was in line with the balance of reasons serves as a moral justification for action.<sup>24</sup> Showing that an act was in line with what an agent had most reason to do seems sufficient to show that the act was not morally wrong. It would be odd for someone to claim that an act was in line with what she had most reason to do but also morally impermissible. Again, Rationalism is able to provide the perfect explanation for this thought; the reason that this is sufficient moral justification is that moral requirements are always in line with what there is most reason to do. As a result, showing that an act is not what an agent has most reason to do is sufficient to show that it is not morally required.

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<sup>23</sup> This point is made by Russ Shafer-Landau in his *Moral Realism: A Defence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) p.192 albeit for the weaker claim that moral requirements always provide some reason for action.

<sup>24</sup> Darwall, *Second Person*, p.98.

Before we are in a position to assess whether the intuitions used to defend Rationalism support Overridingness or Constraint, we must first distinguish between two different ways of understanding Rationalism. This will allow us to see exactly what form of Rationalism these intuitions support.

Rationalism says that it is a necessary truth that morally required acts are what there is most reason to do. This claim can be read in two ways, de dicto and de re. The best way to understand the difference between de re and de dicto necessity is through an example. Consider the following claims:

*Claim 1:* Necessarily, husbands are married.

*Claim 2:* Husbands are necessarily married.

These seem similar but have different truth conditions. Claim 1 is a claim about de dicto necessity while Claim 2 is a claim about de re necessity. The truth or falsity of Claim 1 depends on the truth or falsity of the following conditional proposition: if x is a husband then x is married. This claim is true; it is impossible to be an unmarried husband. Claim 2, on the other hand, is a claim about the individuals in the actual world that are husbands. This claim tells us that these individuals are necessarily married. This claim is false, for any man in this world who is married there are many possible worlds where he is unmarried.

Contrast this with the following example: the Prime Minister of the UK is necessarily the offspring of Mary Fleur and Ian Donald Cameron. In this example the de re necessity seems much more plausible. When we ask whether it is possible that the actual person, David Cameron, who is Prime Minister could have been the offspring

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of other people it seems plausible to think that he could not. We can imagine possibilities about David Cameron, he could have died young, never had children or entered politics. Plausibly, however, he could not have had different parents. Note that the equivalent de dicto necessity claim is much less plausible here. It would have been possible for someone who was the offspring of different parents to have been Prime Minister instead.

The difference, then, between de dicto necessity and de re necessity is that with the former the necessary connection is one that exists between the application of the term while with the latter the application determines what it is that the necessary connection applies to. In the husband example, it is the application of the term 'husband' that is necessarily connected to being married rather than the things that are picked out by this term. On the other hand, in the second example, it is the person picked out by the term 'Prime Minister of The UK' that is necessarily connected to being the offspring of Fleur and Cameron.

Let's now apply these two kinds of necessity claims to Rationalism:

*De Dicto Moral Rationalism:* Necessarily, if an act,  $\phi$ , is morally required then, from an all things considered normative perspective,  $\phi$ -ing is what there is most reason to do.

*De Re Rationalism:* If an act,  $\phi$ , is morally required then necessarily  $\phi$ -ing is what there is most reason to do, from an all things considered normative perspective.

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De Dicto Rationalism says that in every possible world, if an act is morally required then it is what there is most reason to do. De Re Rationalism, on the other hand, says that all of the acts that are morally required in this world have the essential property of being what there is most reason to do. This is a property that will be present across all possible worlds. If De Dicto Rationalism is true then it will be the application of the term ‘moral obligation’ that is necessarily connected to the agents having a rational requirement to perform the acts. On the other hand, if De Re Rationalism is true then it is the acts picked out by this term that have the essential property of being what there is most reason to do.

To see which form of Rationalism the intuitions support consider how we ought, in general, to test claims of de dicto and de re necessity. To test Claim 2 above we must ask whether there is a possible world where someone is a husband without a spouse. To test Claim 3 we must consider someone who is a husband in this world and ask whether there is a possible world where he does not have a spouse. We can use the same tests to see whether Rationalism is best understood as a claim of de dicto or de re necessity. To test for de dicto necessity we must ask whether there is a possible world where an act is both morally required and not what there is most reason to do. To test for de re necessity we must ask whether any act that is morally required could fail to be what there is most reason to do in some other possible world. In the former we are testing the application of ‘morally required’ across possible worlds and in the latter we are using the term ‘morally required’ to pick out the acts that we will test across possible worlds.

Clearly, the intuitions considered in §2 support only a de dicto necessity claim. When we say that moral requirements provide rational justifications and constraints, we do

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not mean that the acts that are morally required in this world are ones that will provide these constraints and justifications in all possible worlds. Rather, what we mean is that in order for it to be appropriate to apply the term ‘morally required’ to an act in any given world, the act must be one that provides rational justifications and constraints in that world. Similarly, when we say that a rational justification serves as a moral justification we do not mean that there is no possible world in which there could be most reason to perform an alternative act to an act that is morally required in this world. Rather, we mean that for any possible world, if such an alternative exists then the act is not morally required in that world.

#### **§4 De Dicto Moral Rationalism, Weak Overridingness and The Constraint**

##### **Thesis**

In §3 I argued that the intuitions that support Rationalism support only the de dicto reading not the de re reading. I will now argue that accepting this provides greater support for Constraint than for Weak Overridingness.

Constraint says that an act cannot be morally required if it is not what there is most reason to do, all things considered. If we understand this as a necessity claim then this claim is logically equivalent to De Dicto Rationalism. This can be clearly seen when we place the two claims side by side:

*De Dicto Moral Rationalism:* Necessarily, if an act,  $\phi$ , is morally required then  $\phi$ -ing is what there is most reason to do.



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*Constraint Thesis*: Necessarily, if an act,  $\phi$ , is not what there is most reason to do then  $\phi$ -ing is not morally required.

These claims are logically equivalent, accepting De Dicto Rationalism commits us to accepting Constraint and vice versa. As a result, Constraint provides the perfect explanation for De Dicto Rationalism. It explains why, in any possible world, if an act is morally required then it must be the case that it is what there is most reason to do in that world.

Overridingness, on the other hand, says that it is a necessary truth that moral reasons, or a subset of moral reasons, override all nonmoral reasons. It is worth noting at this stage that if it were De Re Rationalism that the considerations appealed to in §2 supported then Overridingness could explain Rationalism while Constraint could not. We could not explain the claim that the moral obligations of this world will be what there is most reason to do across all possible worlds by appealing to Constraint, as this only constrains what can be classed as a moral obligation in one world to the balance of reasons in that world. A de re form of Overridingness would be able to explain De Re Rationalism, as this form of Overridingness holds that the acts that are required in this world are supported by reasons that are overriding across all possible worlds.

However, as we have seen, it is the de dicto reading not the de re reading that is supported by the intuitions examined in §2. Overridingness is able to provide an explanation for De Dicto Rationalism but only if it is also understood as a de dicto necessity claim. We can rewrite the two forms of Overridingness as de dicto claims in the following way:

*Strong De Dicto Overridingness*: Necessarily, moral reasons always override all non-moral reasons from an all things considered normative perspective.

*Weak De Dicto Overridingness*: Necessarily, moral requirements always provide or are supported by reasons that override all nonmoral reasons from an all things considered normative perspective.

Like Constraint, these views place constraints on the correct application of moral terms. However, they are different constraints. Strong De Dicto Overridingness places a restriction on what can be counted as a moral reason; they must be reasons that override all nonmoral reasons. Weak De Dicto Overridingness places a constraint on what can be counted as a moral requirement; these must either be supported by or provide reasons that override all non-moral reasons. Combining either with the claim that moral reasons fully determine an act's moral status gives us an explanation for De Dicto Rationalism.

While both Constraint and Overridingness are consistent with De Dicto Rationalism it should now be clear that this form of Rationalism provides more support for Constraint than for Overridingness. As we have already seen Constraint and De Dicto Rationalism are logically equivalent. This means that if we accept De Dicto Rationalism then we are committed to accepting Constraint as well. In contrast, neither version of Overridingness follows from De Dicto Rationalism, as they both make additional claims about the nature of moral reasons or moral requirements that De Dicto Rationalism on its own provides no support for. Strong Overridingness makes the additional claim that in order to class any reason as a moral reason it must

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be one that is capable of overriding all nonmoral reasons. Similarly, Weak

Overridingness makes the additional claim that moral requirements must provide or be supported by reasons that override all nonmoral reasons. Neither follows from accepting De Dicto Rationalism, as it is silent on the reason why moral requirements must be what there is most reason to do. Nor does it follow from the intuitions used to support Rationalism, as these are also silent on whether moral reasons or some subset of moral reasons override other reasons. We cannot move from De Dicto Rationalism to Overridingness without giving an additional argument to convince us that this is the reason that De Dicto Rationalism is true. In the absence of such an argument, we have no reason to think that accepting Rationalism for the reasons given in §2 gives us reason to accept some form of Overridingness.

To sum up, the form of Rationalism that is supported by the intuitions commonly given in favour of the view is logically equivalent to Constraint. Although both forms of De Dicto Overridingness are consistent with this view, they do not follow from it. In order to move from De Dicto Rationalism to some version of Overridingness we need an additional argument that explains why the constraint should be understood in this way.

## **Conclusion**

I began by identifying a common confusion that arises between Rationalism and Overridingness and clarifying the differences between the two. I then argued that the form of Rationalism supported by the intuitions commonly appealed to by those defending the view is logically equivalent to The Constraints Thesis but not to either version of Overridingness. Those who accept Rationalism for the reasons considered

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in this paper should view it as a constraint on what can be counted as a moral  
requirement. We cannot, then, assume that accepting Rationalism gives us reason to  
think that moral reasons are of greater normative importance than nonmoral reasons.<sup>25</sup>

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