

Reasons and Requirements

Benjamin Sachs

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Abstract In this essay I defend the claim that all reasons can ground final requirements. I begin by establishing a prima facie case for the thesis by noting that on a common-sense understanding of what finality is, it must be the case that all reasons can ground such requirements. I spend the rest of the paper defending the thesis against two recent challenges. The first challenge is found in Joshua Gert's recent book, *Brute Rationality*. In it he argues that reasons play two logically distinct roles – requiring action and justifying action. He argues, further, that some reasons – ‘purely justificatory’ reasons – play only the latter role. Jonathan Dancy offers the second challenge in his *Ethics Without Principles*, where he distinguishes between the ‘favoring’ and ‘ought-making’ roles of reasons. While all reasons play the former role, some do not play the latter, and are therefore irrelevant to what one ought to do. My contention is that both Gert and Dancy are going to have trouble accounting for our intuitions in a number of cases.

Keywords Reasons · Practical reason

My main goal in this paper is to defend the claim that it is in the nature of reasons to generate requirements. That is, every reason is the type of thing that can ground requirements.

Many theorists – and I am among them – believe that there are many different kinds of requirements, one for each normative standard. This introduces an element of ambiguity into my thesis. To remedy this, I will specify my thesis as the claim that all reasons can ground *final* requirements. There is some normative standard that is final (I will simply call it the “final standard”) and all reasons can ground requirements of that standard. Also, I am going to use the term “ought” interchangeably with “requirement” and “ought to” with “is required to.”

B. Sachs (✉)

Department of Bioethics, National Institutes of Health, 10 Center Drive, Building 10, Room 1C118
Bethesda, MD 20892-1156, USA
e-mail: basachs@wisc.edu

I take a reason to be a fact about the world that counts in favor of someone's taking some action.¹ I understand 'fact' loosely such that it covers all three types of things that have been commonly thought to be reasons: states of the world, attitudes, and values.² As an example of a state of the world that is a reason I offer the following: The fact that I am hungry is a reason for me to eat. By attitudes I mean especially desire- and goal-having, since it is often said that the mere fact of desiring X, or the having of X as a goal, is a reason to pursue X. Finally, values are often taken to be reasons; it is familiar notion, for instance, that the value of happiness is a reason to seek happiness. Now perhaps only one or two of these types of things really can be reasons; I have no argument here for or against this view. Nothing in this essay turns on its truth, however.

My plan runs as follows. I first offer, in Section 1, an argument intended to establish a *prima facie* case for the claim that it is in the nature of reasons to generate final requirements. If this argument is successful, as I believe it is, it will put the burden on proof on those theorists who deny that claim. My main goal, which I pursue in Section 2, is to counter two prominent attempts to meet this burden – one by Joshua Gert, and another by Jonathan Dancy. Section 3 concludes.

1 An Argument that it is in the Nature of Reasons to Generate Final Requirements

To determine whether it is in the nature of reasons, *per se*, to ground final requirements, we first need to know what a normative standard is. I shall define a normative standard as an ideal of behavior that we have reason to live up to.³ Here, then, is my argument:

1. A normative standard is final just in case it makes no sense to ask whether one ought to violate its requirements.
2. Questions about what one ought to do are questions about reasons. To ask whether one should violate a requirement is to ask whether there are reasons strong enough to justify doing so.
3. Therefore, the final normative standard is the normative standard whose requirements there could not possibly be strong enough reasons to violate. (1,2)
4. The only normative standard that could meet this specification is a normative standard that requires one to act on one's strongest reason (where this is understood *de dicto*).⁴

¹ Note that this entails that there can be reasons that no one has. When we say that someone 'has' a reason, we mean that there is a fact about the world that favors some person performing some action, where that person is both aware of the fact and aware that it favors performing that action. My definition of 'reason' has the consequence that there can be a reason of which the person to whom it applies is unaware. I take this to be intuitively plausible. If, unbeknownst to me, there is a tiger creeping up behind me, then there is a reason for me to run away, though I am unaware of it.

² White (2004)

³ The reader may notice some similarities between my notion of a "normative standard" and David Copp's notion of a "standard," in Copp (1995). I was already several drafts into this essay before I read Copp's book, therefore those similarities are (I hope) simply a matter of the two of us independently grasping the truth about standards, as opposed to my making use of his work.

⁴ Specifically, one's strongest overall, as opposed to basic, reason. So, for instance, my overall reason to go to the grocery store is the combination my reason to get eggs, my reason to get milk, my reason to get bread, etc.

5. There is no reason that, *by its very nature*, can never be the strongest reason one has. The property of not-being-the-strongest-reason-one-has is, for any reason that has it, a contingent property.
6. Therefore, any reason can ground a final requirement. (3–5)

The argument is valid, and premises 1, 2, 4 and 5 are each plausible. Hence, this argument constitutes a *prima facie* case for the thesis that it is in the nature of reasons to generate final requirements. It is possible, of course, that despite its initial plausibility, one or more of the premises is false. And so this argument does not close off further debate, but rather invites it. In that spirit, we turn now to two objections to my thesis.

2 Reasons that Don't Require?

2.1 Gert's Purely Justificatory Reasons

The first theorist whose work I want to consider in this context is Joshua Gert. Gert has recently argued that there are two logically distinct roles that practical reasons fill – justifying action and requiring action – and that some reasons have greater strength in one role than they do in the other.⁵ This distinction is embedded within his account of what is required for a consideration to count as a basic (as opposed to derivative) reason, which runs as follows (79–80).

...a consideration is a *basic reason* if and only if:

- (1) it corresponds to an intelligible object of human motivation
- (2) it plays at least one of the functional roles (i) or (ii), and has constant strengths, and is comparable to all other reasons, within and across these roles
 - i. making it rationally permissible to do actions that would, without it, be irrational, or
 - ii. making it rationally required to do actions that would, without it, be rationally permissible to omit.

If a reason can fulfill role (i), then it is said to have *justifying* strength. If a reason can fulfill role (ii), then it is said to have *requiring* strength.

I want to elaborate on conditions (i) and (ii), since they will be the focus of my discussion for now. To use Gert's example as an illustration of condition (i) (22–3): we would think it rationally permissible for someone to risk injury and death in order to save three or four people from severe malnutrition, whereas in the absence of this consideration (or some other consideration), risking injury and death would be considered irrational. Therefore, this consideration – saving three or four people from malnutrition – meets condition (i). To illustrate condition (ii), under normal conditions we would think it rational to choose not to eat apples. However, a person who needed to eat apples to survive would be rationally required to do so, other considerations aside. Therefore, the risk of death can require one to do something that one would otherwise be rationally permitted to not do, and therefore meets condition (ii).

⁵ Gert (2004). All references to Gert in this chapter are from this book. My comprehension of Gert's book has been greatly aided by extensive correspondence and conversation with him, for which I am appreciative.

I propose that we accept, for the sake of argument, that reasons play two logically distinct roles. The crucial matter, for our purposes, is Gert's contention that there are reasons with no strength at all in the requiring role – "purely justificatory" reasons. If he is right, then it would then be false to say that all reasons can generate requirements of rationality. Now we add Gert's claim that rationality is the final normative standard,⁶ and we end up with an objection to the thesis that is the subject of this essay.

Gert's strategy for establishing that there are purely justificatory reasons is to construct an account of objective irrationality which, if we accept it, requires us also to accept that there are purely justificatory reasons. Before we examine the argument for the account, let us first look at the account itself:

An action is objectively irrational iff it involves a nontrivial risk, to the agent, of nontrivial pain, disability, loss of pleasure, or loss of freedom, or premature death without a sufficient chance that someone (not necessarily the agent) will avoid one of these same consequences, or will get pleasure, ability, or freedom, to a compensating degree. (141)

The feature of this account that is important for our purposes is that the account holds that consequences for people other than the agent (the extent to which the action affects their abilities or freedom, or causes them pleasure) can make an otherwise irrational action rational, but cannot make an otherwise rational action irrational. And so other-regarding reasons – "altruistic reasons," to use Gert's terminology – are purely justificatory.⁷

Gert argues for his account of irrationality by establishing certain adequacy conditions on a theory of irrationality – facts about the concept of rationality or our use of the relevant terms that any good theory of rationality must explain – and then arguing that something like his account is needed in order to meet these conditions. There are eight such conditions. I will discuss only the first, second and sixth, since, according to Gert, they are the conditions that force us to adopt an account of irrationality on which there are purely justificatory reasons.

2.2 The Argument from the First and Second Adequacy Conditions

Gert's first and second adequacy conditions, when combined, require that a theory of objective irrationality must allow for the conceptual truth – or what Gert takes to be a conceptual truth – that rationality is the final normative standard (1–2). From this truth, certain other truths follow.

...it should be analytic that there can never be a sufficient reason or a compelling argument to perform an action that is understood to be irrational in this sense, and that there is in fact always a reason *not* to do it. This gives some clue as to what we may mean when we say that an action is irrational in this sense. We may mean that no one could ever sincerely offer anything as a sufficient reason for such an action.... Now we are most often sincere in our recommendations when we are speaking with our friends. Therefore, a good heuristic in thinking about what it is to regard something as

⁶ Gert's T1 and T2 (p. 16)

⁷ It has been suggested to me that it is irrational to do what one believes one is rationally required not to do. The account of Gert's that we are considering cannot accommodate this intuition. Realizing this, Gert argues that this sort of behavior is only *subjectively* irrational, not objectively irrational. This response seems adequate.

irrational in the sense given by [the account of rationality on which the rational standard is final] is provided by keeping in mind that it should in general not be possible for anyone to recommend an action to a friend if one regards it as irrational, in this sense. (138)

From this insight about what it means for a normative standard to be final, Gert moves to his preliminary account of objective irrationality on which an action is irrational if and only if we could not understand someone sincerely recommending to someone else that he or she do it.⁸ Gert holds we cannot understand as sincere a recommendation to an agent that he or she perform an action that might likely cause him or her pain, disability or loss of freedom, unless such harms are compensated for by the action's saving someone (not necessarily the agent) from such harms, or enabling them to enjoy the corresponding benefits (pleasure, ability, freedom), to a sufficient degree. It follows that it is irrational to perform such actions. And this is just what Gert's account of objective irrationality, which I gave earlier, says. Further, as I have mentioned, on this account of irrationality altruistic reasons cannot require action, and are consequently purely justificatory.

There is a move Gert makes early on in this argument that I want to call into question. He claims that objective rationality's finality has consequences with regard to what we can recommend. Namely, one would never recommend to a friend, or anyone to whom one were speaking sincerely, that he or she perform an action that is objectively irrational in a final sense. But it seems to me that, as a generalization, this is false. Depending on the context, often when one asks for a recommendation one expects to receive, in response, a judgment that is partial. By 'partial,' I just mean that such a judgment gives special weight to whatever considerations are important to the person requesting the recommendation. Further, it is only because of this partiality that virtually no one can sincerely recommend to an agent that he or she perform an action that might likely cause that agent pain, disability or loss of freedom unless such harms are compensated for by the action's saving someone (not necessarily the agent) from such harms or enabling them to enjoy the corresponding benefits to a sufficient degree. By contrast, what one ought to do, in a final sense, is a matter to be settled impartially – that is, without giving extra weight to any particular considerations based on who is affected by them.

Gert's argument from the first and second adequacy conditions goes as follows. First, objective rationality is the final normative standard. Second, rationality's finality is intimately related to what we can sincerely recommend that people do. Finally, the recommendations that we recognize as sincere treat altruistic concerns as purely justificatory. This gives us a good reason to adopt an account of objective irrationality that builds in altruistic reasons as purely justificatory. My objection was to the second step. In some cases, when we seek a recommendation we are *not* seeking a judgment about what we ought, in a final sense to do. If we *were* seeking such a judgment, then it would be inappropriate for the recommender to treat other people's interests as purely justificatory when reasoning toward her recommendation.

2.3 The Argument from the Sixth Adequacy Condition

Gert's sixth adequacy condition on a theory of irrationality is that it has to be able to make sense of the intuitive connection between irrationality and defective mental functioning.⁹ To

⁸ This is a combination of Gert's A1 and A2 on p. 140.

⁹ Gert's T6 (p. 17).

call someone irrational is quite often to cast doubt upon whether that person's mind is working properly in the sense that is relevant for moral responsibility, competence to give consent, etc. (5–6). This concept of irrationality – the “mental functioning” sense, as Gert calls it – is distinct from the concept of irrationality in the “final normative standard” sense. For this reason, Gert argues, we need two different accounts of irrationality. The one that corresponds to the mental functioning sense Gert labels an account of “subjective irrationality,” while the one that corresponds to the final normative standard sense is labeled an account of “objective irrationality” (153–4). The account of irrationality we have already looked at is Gert's account of objective irrationality. His account of subjective irrationality runs as follows:

An action is subjectively irrational iff it proceeds from a state of the agent that (a) normally puts an agent at increased risk of performing objectively irrational actions, and (b) has its adverse effect by influencing the formation of intentions in light of sensory evidence and beliefs. (160)

Gert arrives at this view by making several appeals to our intuitions, elicited through thought experiments, about what sorts of behaviors count as evidence against the proper mental functioning of an agent. At the most general level, the point that the thought experiments are intended to convey is that a failure to take one's own interests into account, when deciding what to do, constitutes evidence against one's proper mental functioning, whereas the parallel failure with regard to others' interests does not.¹⁰ Another way to put this is that a charge of subjective irrationality is appropriate when the agent treats self-interested considerations as having no requiring force, whereas treating altruistic considerations as having no requiring force is not grounds for a charge of subjective irrationality. One way to account for all this, as Gert notes, would have been to build the distinction between the justifying and requiring force of reasons into our account of subjective irrationality (160). But this would have seemed ad hoc – the only thing such an account of subjective irrationality would have had going for it would be that it fits our intuitions. Moreover, it wouldn't be clear how that standard could have any normative force – seemingly ad hoc standards are like that. Ideally, we would like an account of subjective rationality to explain *why* self-interested and altruistic considerations play differing roles in our judgments of subjective (ir)rationality, and we should be able to see why we have reason to live up to that standard. Well, why do they? The reason for the differing roles of self-interested and altruistic reasons in our judgments, according to Gert, is that a failure to treat self-interested reasons as having requiring force puts us at increased risk of performing objectively irrational actions, while a failure to treat altruistic reasons as having requiring force does not. This, of course, is because the account of objective irrationality treats self-interested reasons, but not altruistic reasons, as having requiring force. The reason we have to avoid doing subjectively irrational things is that when we do subjectively irrational things we are at greater risk of doing objectively irrational things, and we have (final) reason to avoid doing objectively irrational things.

Thus, Gert arrives at his account of subjective irrationality, given above. We are now in a position to see how the sixth adequacy condition grounds an argument for the existence of purely justificatory reasons. The sixth adequacy condition states that an account of subjective irrationality must explain the connection between irrationality and defective mental functioning. A failure to take one's own interests into account, when deciding what

¹⁰ Gert originally makes this claim on p. 9.

to do, constitutes evidence against the proper mental functioning of an agent, whereas the parallel failure with regard to others' interests does not. The best way to capture this fact in an account of subjective irrationality involves having that account make reference to an account of objective irrationality on which altruistic reasons are purely justificatory. Therefore, the existence of purely justificatory reasons is required by, though not built into, the best account of subjective irrationality.

My objection to this account of subjective irrationality runs as follows. If subjective irrationality is a property of actions, then, like other normative properties of actions, it is both supervenient and intrinsic. It is supervenient because there can be no change in its presence or absence without an accompanying change in the presence or absence of some other or properties. It is intrinsic because at least some of those other properties are intrinsic. An easy example is of a normative property of actions that works like this is wrongness. Whether an action is wrong depends on other properties of the action, and some of those other properties are intrinsic to that action. The intrinsic properties of an action, I take it, are those properties that make it the action it is, as opposed to some other action. These include the basic mechanics of the action (the ball was kicked with such-and-such force and moved such-and-such a distance in such-and-such a direction), who performed it, when it was performed, where it was performed, etc.¹¹ However, on Gert's account, the subjective irrationality of an action supervenes entirely on a non-intrinsic property of that action: its proceeding from a certain state of the agent. Interestingly, the least drastic alteration of the account necessary to avoid this problem yields the following:

A person is subjectively irrational if she has a disposition that (a) normally puts an agent at increased risk of performing actions that involve a nontrivial risk, to the agent, of nontrivial pain, disability, loss of pleasure, or loss of freedom, or premature death without a sufficient chance that someone (not necessarily the agent) will avoid one of these same consequences, or will get pleasure, ability, or freedom, to a compensating degree, and (b) has its adverse effect by influencing the formation of intentions in the light of sensory evidence and beliefs.

This account of subjective irrationality is a standard for judging persons, not actions. Gert's mistake is thinking that there is anything subjective about the rationality of actions. The rationality of persons, on the other hand, is *by its very nature* a subjective matter.

Suppose we were to accept this account of the subjective rationality of persons. Would we then have any reason to accept that there are purely justificatory reasons? The answer is that the account, *on its own*, provides no reason to do so. On this account, being disposed not to act on altruistic reasons does not make a person irrational. The question, then, is whether there could be any explanation for this aside from altruistic reasons being purely justificatory. I think there is such an explanation – Gert gives it to us. He says that judgments of subjective rationality are connected with judgments about proper mental functioning. Not being disposed to act on altruistic reasons does not license a charge of defective mental functioning. This explains why the correct account of subjective rationality does not condemn being disposed not to act on altruistic reasons. Furthermore,

¹¹ This might seem overly simplistic, since we often think that the wrongness of an action supervenes on much less basic properties of the action: for instance, whether that action was an instance of rights-violation. Notice, however, that the property of being a violation of rights is an intrinsic property of an action (since it supervenes on the properties of the action that make it the action it is – like that it was a killing), and therefore wrongness remains an intrinsic property of an action even if it supervenes on the property of being a rights-violation.

this account of subjective irrationality does not run afoul of Gert's commitment to not build the distinction between the justifying and requiring force of reasons into an account of subjective rationality, and therefore is not ad hoc (at least not in this respect).

We turn now to another denial of the claim that it is in the nature of reasons to generate final requirements, one offered by Jonathan Dancy.

2.4 Dancy and Enticing Reasons

Dancy, like Gert, distinguishes two logically distinct roles that reasons can play. Dancy's distinction, which he elaborates in his *Ethics Without Principles*, is between favoring and ought-making. Dancy argues at length that there is no acceptable reductive or functional analysis of what is involved in playing these roles.¹² All he says is that for an reason to play a favoring role is for it to be relevant to thinking about what to do (practical reasoning), while for a reason to play an ought-making role is for it to be relevant to thinking about what one ought to do (a form of theoretical reasoning). So if there were a reason that played the favoring role but not the ought-making role, it would not be relevant to what one ought to do.¹³ My thesis would then be false.

For Dancy, enticing reasons are, by definition, just such reasons. He says of enticing reasons that "they never take us to an ought; it is not true of an enticing reason that if one has one of them and no reason of any other sort, one ought to do what reason entices one to do." (p. 21)

What sorts of reasons are enticing? According to Dancy, evaluative reasons – reasons grounded in considerations of what is good and bad (p. 24). Unfortunately, he does not clearly stake out a position on whether *all* evaluative reasons are enticing.¹⁴ As a matter of charity, however, it seems we should try to avoid attributing to him an affirmative answer. In all the years of debate over whether certain considerations – deontological, teleological, aesthetic – have any bearing on what we ought to do, it has always been assumed that there is one sort of consideration that undoubtedly does: self-interest. But for something to be in my self-interest is for it to be good for me, and this connection with the concept of what is good for me makes self-interest-based reasons evaluative. And if my self-interest-based reasons are evaluative, and all evaluative reasons are enticing, then I have only enticing reasons to pursue my self-interest. It would then never be the case that I ought to. But this is crazy. For instance, we might tell a loved one or a close friend that she ought to eat more healthful foods, or take a vacation, or wait until that car goes on sale before buying it.¹⁵

¹² Dancy (2004a). All references to Dancy are from this book, unless otherwise specified.

¹³ Dancy does not distinguish between different kinds of oughts, so we cannot know for sure that by 'ought' he means 'finally ought.' But if there are reasons that are not relevant to what one ought to do, then *a fortiori* there are reasons that are not relevant to what one *finally* ought to do. So Dancy is, indeed, committed to denying the claim that it is in the nature of reasons to generate final requirements.

¹⁴ He does say that the reason for having your brakes checked is peremptory Dancy (2004b). This reason, it seems to me, is evaluative.

¹⁵ Perhaps such claims are simply universally false (although I don't think we should concede even this). However, at the very least it is false that people ought to eat *fewer* healthful foods. But if there were even the slightest peremptory reason in favor of eating fewer healthful foods, then Dancy would have to deny this claim as well! For on this interpretation of Dancy, he, unlike Gert, is committed to the claim that there is an entire class of reasons that can neither establish nor undermine ought claims. The reason in favor of eating more healthful foods, on this interpretation, is one of these reasons, and thus it cannot outweigh even the weakest contrary peremptory reason.

It would be better, therefore, to attribute to Dancy the view that only *some* evaluative reasons are enticing. This reading fits comfortably with Dancy's repeated claims in a paper published just before *Ethics Without Principles* that enticing reasons are concerned with what is fun, amusing, attractive, etc.¹⁶ He seems to imply, for instance, that the reason to see a play and the reason to go to a hairdresser are enticing.¹⁷ Clearly there are many things that are good without being remotely fun, amusing, or attractive. The challenge for Dancy will be to provide grounds for distinguishing those evaluative reasons that are peremptory from the ones that are enticing. Surely, however, this will be difficult. It seems odd to suggest that some reasons arising out of considerations of what would be good or bad can ground ought claims, while others can't. It is much more intuitively plausible to suggest that, rather than there being two kinds of evaluative reasons whose very nature is different, there is rather a continuum of evaluative reasons that range from the very strong (read: easily able to ground oughts) to the very weak (read: able to ground oughts only in the rare, or perhaps merely hypothetical, situation in which there are no other relevant considerations).

Dancy's strategy seems to be to challenge the notion that trivial evaluative reasons could ground oughts – at least oughts as we standardly conceive of them. Here is what he has to say:

One might allow that there is a weak sense of 'ought' in which one ought to choose the most enjoyable way of spending the afternoon, where no considerations other than pleasure are at stake. But in this weak sense of 'ought', it might be both that one ought overall to choose this and that one is permitted not to choose it.¹⁸ And this is hardly a sense of 'ought' at all. (p. 21, fn. 7)

Here Dancy seems to admit that all evaluative reasons, even the trivial ones, can ground oughts. I have contended that this is a counterexample to Dancy's claim that evaluative reasons are enticing. But Dancy, if this second reading of him is accurate, would counter that the oughts grounded by evaluative reasons are weak, in that one might permissibly violate them.

What kind of permissibility is Dancy referring to here? Perhaps he is claiming that it is *morally* permissible to violate any ought grounded solely in evaluative reasons. But this claim is both analytically and obviously true; surely Dancy was trying to say something more interesting. Moreover, for our purposes such a claim is of little interest, since it is compatible with the claim that it is impermissible, in a final sense, to violate such oughts, and thus also compatible with the claim that it is in the nature of reasons to generate final requirements.

Alternatively, Dancy may intend to concede that it is permissible *in a final sense*, to violate any ought grounded solely in trivial evaluative reasons. In order to evaluate the truth of this claim, it would be helpful to think about a situation in which someone fails to Φ , where the only reason in favor of Φ -ing is a trivial evaluative reason, and there are no reasons to not Φ . Adopting Dancy's example, we might suppose that one has a reason to

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 114. See also p. 99.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp 100 and 105.

¹⁸ Dancy mentions that he got the idea for this response from John Broome. Ibid., pp 101–102. In the paper, unlike in his book, Dancy is explicit about not wanting to concede that enticing reasons can ground oughts – even "weak" ones. He does, however, recognize that he is under significant pressure to make this concession.

have an enjoyable afternoon, and then imagine the situation in which there are no opposing considerations. The trouble, however, is that it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to imagine such a situation. First, life is never this simple. We always have reasons to act otherwise than we in fact act. Second, the very idea of someone choosing *for no reason at all* to not have an enjoyable afternoon puts a heavy strain on one's imaginative capacity, like trying to imagine what it would be like to be a bat.¹⁹ One's mind can't help but make the scenario more familiar by adding the presence of a reason not to have an enjoyable afternoon, such as preferring to mourn or do something productive, or having an obligation to do something else.

The big picture is this: Dancy is right that we can have a reason to do something on the grounds that it would be fun, amusing, attractive, etc. But we cannot appeal to thought experiments in order to make progress in thinking about whether a failure to act on such reasons is ever a violation of a final requirement. In order to eliminate all possible conflating variables, we'd have to imagine a situation in which, *for no reason*, one chooses not to do the fun, amusing, or attractive thing. But this, I suggest, cannot be done.

Now if one can't actually imagine the situation, then one can't have intuitions about it, and one is likely to simply offer as one's supposed intuition what is in fact one's answer to the corresponding theoretical question: Is one finally required to Φ , where Φ -ing is supported only by a trivial evaluative reason and there are no reasons not to Φ ? Our attempt to answer this question by appeal to intuitions has proved fruitless and left us with the task of tackling the question directly. I took up this task, albeit briefly, earlier when I noted that it would be very strange to suppose that within a group of reasons all of which are grounded in the same considerations (goodness and badness, in this case), there are some that can ground oughts and some that cannot. Reasons grounded in similar considerations should, it seems, behave similarly. This reflection, no doubt, is inconclusive, but it is enough to keep the burden of proof on Dancy. Surely he has not yet met this burden.

It remains unclear, therefore, exactly the sense in which oughts grounded solely in evaluative reasons are weak. It seems Dancy ought to concede that all evaluative reasons can ground oughts in the everyday sense. It follows that all evaluative reasons are not enticing. The question then becomes, which ones are? Dancy no longer has an answer. But his challenge to the claim that it is in the nature of reasons to generate requirements was predicated on the existence of enticing reasons.²⁰

¹⁹ I borrow this example, of course, from Thomas Nagel, although Nagel uses it in the service of a different point. Nagel (1974).

²⁰ One might think that the fact of supererogation demonstrates that there can be reasons that don't require. (I would deny this straight off, since I don't believe that supererogation is possible. But I understand that this is a minority view, so I will make my response without assuming its truth.) Suppose Φ -ing would be supererogatory. Two things seem to follow from this. First, there is at least one reason to Φ , and second, one is not morally required to Φ . So, it seems, the reason to Φ cannot ground a moral requirement, from which we can reasonably infer that it cannot ground a final requirement either. But this appearance is deceiving. All moral reasons *can* ground moral requirements. It's just that some never, in fact, do. For instance, the moral reason to save X's life, where X can be saved only by receiving a heart transplant with you as the donor (perhaps you both have a rare kind of blood), never in fact grounds a moral requirement. This is because in order to save X's life, one would have to sacrifice one's own, and one is never morally required to sacrifice one's own life to save that of a stranger. Such an act is supererogatory. Nevertheless, were it possible to save X's life while making little or no sacrifice, then one would be morally required to do so. This shows that the moral reason to save X's life can ground moral requirements. The same story could be told with respect to other reasons to engage in acts that are supererogatory.

3 Conclusion

In this essay I have argued that it is in the nature of reasons, per se, to ground final requirements. My argumentative strategy has been to place the burden of proof on those who would deny this thesis and then show how they have failed to meet this burden. I established a burden of proof by arguing that on an intuitive understanding of what finality is, it *must* be the case that all reasons can ground final requirements. I then examined recent attempts by Joshua Gert and Jonathan Dancy to demonstrate that all reasons do *not* behave similarly, and that in fact there is a sharp division between reasons that can ground requirements and reasons that cannot. In both cases I found that the arguments offered to establish the division do not hold up to scrutiny.

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