Taking Something as a Reason for Action

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Forthcoming in *Philosophical Papers*

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Abstract: This paper proposes and defends an account of what it is to act for reasons. In the first part, I will discuss the desire-belief and the deliberative model of acting for reasons. I will argue that we can avoid the weaknesses and retain the strengths of both views, if we pursue an alternative according to which acting for reasons involves *taking* something as a reason. In the main part, I will develop an account of what it is to take something as a reason for action. On the basis of this, I will then offer a new account of what it is to act for reasons.

1. Introduction

What is it to act for reasons? The most familiar answer to this question is provided by the desire-belief model. A radically different account is given by a deliberative model, and a third alternative is to pursue an approach that appeals to the idea that we *take*, *treat*, or *endorse* something as a reason when we act for it. Within normative ethics and meta-ethics, several philosophers have argued for a view that falls under this third approach.[1] In contrast, not much focused attention has been given to this alternative in the philosophy of action.[2] As a result, most of the existing accounts that fall under the third approach have been shaped by particular ethical and meta-ethical aims and commitments. My aim here is to propose and defend a version of the third approach from an action theoretical point of view—free from any aims and commitments in ethical theorizing. In the first part, I will begin with a discussion of the desire-belief model, and I will outline what I take to be the most important objections to this view. Then we will briefly turn to the deliberative model. This view avoids the main problems of the desire-belief model, but it is also too demanding

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[1] Darwall 1983, Gibbard 1990, Quinn 1993, Korsgaard 1996, Scanlon 1998, Schroeder 2007, and Setiya 2007. Schroeder says that an appeal to '*take-the-consideration-to-be-a-reason*' is now a standard approach (152). This is true, perhaps, for ethics and meta-ethics, but not for the philosophy of mind, decision theory, and empirical psychology, where the desire-belief model is still the standard view.
[2] A notable exception is Bratman 1996 and 2000.

in obvious respects. We will see that this dialectic favors the third approach, according to which acting for a reason involves taking something as a reason. In the main part, I will develop an account of what it is to take something as a reason. On the basis of this, I will then offer an account of what it is to act for reasons. In the final part, I will add some further remarks and clarifications and I will offer responses to two objections.

I should stress, right at the outset, that my main aim here is to present a *plausible case* for an alternative account of what it is to act for reasons. This involves many complex issues that cannot be discussed in full detail due to limitations of space. I should stress, also, that I do not take myself to present a conclusive case against the desire-belief model. Nevertheless, I think that the arguments that I will present are plausible and strong enough to motivate the pursuit of an alternative account, and the dialectic between the desire-belief and the deliberative model will suggest that an account in terms of an agent's taking something as a reason is a promising candidate for this.

2. The desire-belief model

The desire-belief model says, basically, that an action is done for reasons just in case it is caused, in the right way, by a desire-belief combination that rationalizes its performance. Typically, desires and beliefs rationalize by providing a means-end rationale, and the agent is acting for a reason because the action is based on mental attitudes that correspond to an instance of means-end reasoning (Davidson 1963).[3]

The desire-belief model has been widely discussed, and it has been widely criticized —within practical philosophy and the philosophy of action, at least. I will restrict my considerations here to the points that I deem most important and that will help me to set the stage for the view that acting for a reason is based on taking something as a reason. I shall begin with two points that count in favor of the view. A first advantage of the desire-belief model consists in its causal dimension. It can explain what it is to act *for* and on *the basis of* reason-giving attitudes in terms of efficient causation, and it provides, thereby, an account of what Davidson called the "mysterious connection" between reasons and actions

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[3] There are other ways in which beliefs can connect actions to desired ends, and there appears to be a problem for actions that are done for their own sake. But we can ignore these complications here. For more on this see Goldman 1970 and Audi 1986, for instance.

(Davidson 1963: 11).[4] A second advantage consists in its psychological austerity. The view does not require conscious deliberation about pros and cons. It does not even require conscious reasoning from desired ends to means, as a disposition to reason that way is, arguably, sufficient (see Davidson 1978: 85–86). This is commonly thought to be an advantage, as many actions that are not preceded by conscious reasoning appear to be done for reasons.

The most serious problem for the view stems, in my opinion, from the evaluative dimension of acting for reasons. There are various kinds of cases in which an action is based on desires and beliefs, but in which the agent does not see anything good or worthwhile in the action. This point has often been made in terms of the distinction between *desiring* something and seeing it as *desirable*. An agent may be motivated by a desire (in combination with beliefs) without seeing the desired course of action as desirable—without seeing anything that favors, recommends, or justifies the action (see Watson 1975, Darwall 1983, Velleman 1992, and Bratman 2000, for instance).

A closely related objection says that the desire-belief model lacks the resources to account for deliberative action. Some actions that are done for reasons *are* based on conscious deliberation about pros and cons. Proponents of the desire-belief model might appeal to the motivational strength of desires in order to explain what the *weighing* of reasons for and against an action consists in. But this is unpromising, as there is no good reason to think that an agent's evaluative ranking of reasons can be reduced to the relative strength of his or her desires (see Raz 1999, for instance). Again, the problem is that what is desired may not be judged desirable. In particular, what is judged to be more (or less) desirable than something else may not be more (or less) desired. Given this, the mentioned psychological austerity can be both an advantage and a disadvantage, depending on whether one considers non-deliberative or deliberative actions.

In response to both objections, proponents of the desire-belief model might adopt Davidson's later position, according to which desiring something just is to see it as desirable (1978: 86–87). But this seems unconvincing. The intuitive and commonsense concept of desire clearly allows for desires that are out of line with the agent's value

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[4] It has been argued that the theory fails, in fact, to explain what it is to act for reason as it cannot explain what the right or non-deviant way of causation consists in. I have addressed this challenge elsewhere (Schlosser 2007, 2010b, and 2011).

judgments, and it is part of common experience to have desires that are not in accord with one's evaluations. It seems, in other words, that the proposed response is based on an overly narrow and implausible conception of desire. Arguably, this point is not decisive, but it puts, I think, considerable pressure on the view. (We will return to this below.)

3. Conscious deliberation and reason-taking

According to a deliberative model, an agent's reasons for action are, roughly, the things that the agent considers and weighs in conscious deliberation. A pure version of this view says, basically, that an action is done for reasons just in case it is based on conscious practical deliberation. This view avoids the mentioned problems of the desire-belief model by construing reasons as the things that the agent considers in deliberation as justifying reasons for and against the action. Some philosophers take the deliberative model as a plausible starting point (Darwall 1983, Schueler 2003, and Enç 2003, for instance). But no one, as far as I know, holds a pure version of this view. The obvious reason is that this view is psychologically implausible: it seems clear, and it is widely agreed, that many actions that are done for reasons are not preceded by conscious deliberation.

But we can adopt a central idea behind this view without requiring conscious deliberation. This is the idea that an agent's reasons for an action are the things that the agent *takes*, *treats*, or *endorses* as justifying reasons for the action (see Darwall 1983, Gibbard 1990, Korsgaard 1996, Scanlon 1998, Raz 1999, and Bratman 2000). In this way, one can avoid the problems of the desire-belief model without being committed to the overly demanding psychology of the deliberative model. This dialectic provides a good reason to pursue an alternative approach according to which acting for a reason involves, essentially, taking something as a reason. For the sake of brevity, and for want of a better term, I shall refer to this psychological element from now on as an agent's *reason-taking*.

4. The desire-belief model cont.

Proponents of the desire-belief model may respond to this by pointing out that an appeal to reason-taking is not only compatible with the desire-belief model, but that this model provides a good explanation of what it is to take something as a reason for action. Return to the mentioned amendment of the view, according to which desiring something just is to see

it as desirable. The objection to this view was that it is committed to an overly narrow and implausible conception of desire. Proponents might reply that this objection is beside the point. They may well be aware of the fact that this notion of desire is technical and stipulative, and they may argue that this is not a problem, precisely because this notion of desire is supposed to capture reason-taking. The suggestion is here that desiring something is to see it as desirable, worthwhile, or in some sense good: desiring an end just is to see a good and minimally justifying reason to pursue and promote the end (see Bratman 2000: 51-52). On this view, then, the possession of a desire just is the possession of a reason-taking attitude (see Scanlon 1998: 37–39 and Schroeder 2007: 150–58).

Is it plausible to suggest that the desire-belief model provides an account of reason-taking? Another common objection is relevant here. It has been argued that the desire-belief model is inadequate for the simple reason that in practical reasoning we hardly ever, if ever, consider our own desires as reasons, which means that we hardly ever, if ever, take our desires as reasons for actions (Schueler 2003 and Schroeder 2007, for instance). We can distinguish here between a first-personal and a normative point. Consider some examples that illustrate the first-personal point. Suppose that Mona is contemplating a weekend trip to Paris. In her deliberation she gives weight to the consideration that she has never been to Paris and that there is a great exhibition on display in the Louvre. Mona, it seems, takes these *considerations* as her reasons for going to Paris. Something similar can be said about non-deliberative cases. Suppose that Pete takes an umbrella, because there are thick clouds hanging over the sky, and consider Sue who jumps into a river in order to save a drowning child. It is possible, and likely, that neither Pete nor Sue engages in deliberation about pros and cons (Pete acts, perhaps, out of habit and Sue under time pressure). Nevertheless, both act for a reason, and it seems only plausible to suppose that they take something, some consideration, as their reason (a consideration along the lines of "it looks like rain" and "I better do something, or else that child is going to drown"). This is not to say that there is nothing that these agents *want*. But it suggests that they take considerations, rather than some of their desires, as their reasons for action.

According to the related normative point, it is plausible to think that, in ordinary cases, we *should* not take our own desires into consideration during practical reasoning,

because this would be overly self-interested or self-regarding (see Schroeder 2007: 24–27).[5] In principle, the desire-belief model is compatible with the view that acting for reasons is always self-interested or self-regarding. But it is by no means committed to this, and the vast majority of its proponents reject this view.

There is, however, a response that acknowledges both points. It says, basically, that what comes into view, from the agent's perspective, are not desires, but desired ends. Given this, proponents of the view may assume that desires are operative in the background (Pettit & Smith 1990), or that they are efficacious background conditions (Schroeder 2007). It is worth noting that the former formulation of this background version of the desire-belief model gives rise to a worry that can be mitigated by the latter. If it is assumed that desires are usually operative in the background, then it seems that usually the reasons for which we act do not come fully into view. This view compromises the transparency in acting for reasons to a degree that one may find worrying. But this worry can be mitigated, if we assume that desires are background conditions which are not among the agent's reasons at all. On this view, desires are reasons only in the sense that they explain why the agent takes certain things as reasons—in particular, they explain why the agent takes certain ends as reason-giving, but they are not themselves taken as reasons for action.

Given this, we can conclude that the desire-belief model can accommodate the mentioned first-personal and normative considerations, and that a background version of the model can also preserve an adequate degree of transparency. This does not settle the question of whether or not reason-taking attitudes can be reduced to desires (or desire-belief combinations), and further below I will argue that such a reduction is implausible. But we can see now that even according to the most plausible version of the desire-belief model—the background version—an agent's reasons for action are the things that the agent takes as reasons.

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[5] There are exceptions. A common example is the persistence of an obsessive desire that gives the agent a reason to seek professional help. In such cases, one may well take one's own desire into consideration, and it seems appropriate to do so. However, this point does not generalize, as such cases are clearly exceptional. Further, the desire itself does not constitute a reason-taking attitude in such cases, because what is taken as a reason is not the desired end, but the consideration that one has a desire which is obsessive. In other words, the obsessive desire is taken to provide a reason, but not for the right action: it is not taken to provide a reason for the pursuit of the desired end.

5. An agent's reasons

We started with the question of what it is to act for reasons. One may approach this question by asking what *reasons* for actions are. I have argued that both the dialectic between the desire-belief and the deliberative model and the debate about the desire-belief model lend support to the view that the reasons for which an agent acts are the things that the agent takes as reasons for the action. Let us call the things that an agent takes as reasons the *agent's reasons*. How does this notion relate to more familiar notions and distinctions concerning reasons for action? Some clarifications are in order.

In the literature one can find a number of distinctions that are relevant here. The most familiar ones are the distinctions between internal and external, motivating and normative, and explanatory and justifying reasons (see Williams 1979, Bond 1983, Smith 1987, and Dancy 2000, for instance). We can set aside the first distinction. It concerns primarily the question of what reasons for action *there are* and whether or not they depend on desires, whereas our question is what it is to *act for* reasons. It seems plausible to think that the second and the third distinction are equivalent, because it seems that motivating reasons explain the performance of actions, and that normative reasons justify them. This is an important and a very familiar distinction, and one should note that it is compatible with the claim that one and the same reason can be both normative and motivating (or both justifying and explanatory).

But this is not without problems. Any factor that is among the causes of an action is an explanatory reason of that action. Given this, it is not clear that every explanatory reason is also a motivating reason—a reason that motivates *the agent* to perform the action. But as nothing of substance hangs on this point, I shall assume that explanatory reasons are motivating reasons. More importantly, the distinction between normative and justifying reasons, on the one hand, and motivating and explanatory reasons, on the other, does not capture an important notion of a reason for action. This becomes obvious when we consider the possibility that an agent can be wrong about what justifies what. In particular, an agent may incorrectly take something as a justifying (or normative) reason for an action. If this is the case, the agent's reason is not a justifying (or normative) reason because it does not in fact justify. But it is also not correct to describe it as a reason that is merely explanatory (or motivating). There is an impressive amount of psychological evidence that shows how our

choices and actions can be influenced by unconscious or subliminal factors (see Hassin et al. 2005, for instance). Such factors are explanatory reasons, provided that they are among the causes of the action. In some cases, they might even rationalize the performance of the action. But in most cases, they have no rationalizing force whatsoever. In such cases, unconscious or subliminal factors are *merely* explanatory of the agent's behavior, and they are clearly not things *for which* or *in the light of which* the agent acts—they are clearly not things that the agent takes as reasons. Given this, we can see that the mentioned distinction does not capture the suggested notion of an agent's reasons, because an agent's reasons are neither merely explanatory or motivating, nor are they necessarily justifying or normative (similar considerations can be found in Bond 1983).

There is a long tradition in philosophy according to which reasons for action are justifying or normative reasons, and it has been suggested that it is a conceptual truth that reasons in this "standard normative sense" are things that favor or recommend, providing some rational justification (Scanlon 1998: 19 and 50). I tend to agree with this. But given that merely explanatory or motivating factors can also be given as reasons, and given that the agent might be mistaken about what justifies what, claims about acting for reasons should be qualified and regimented. To this end, let me propose first a distinction between four different types of reason explanations of actions.

In line with what has been suggested so far, let us say that there is (A) a *psychological explanation* of why an agent performs a certain type of action if and only if the agent has (conscious or unconscious) mental states that explain this, that there is (B) a psychological *reason* explanation of an action if and only if the agent has (conscious or unconscious) mental states that explain and *rationalize* the performance of the action, that there is (C) an explanation of an action in terms of the *agent's reasons* if and only if the action is explained and rationalized by the agent's taking something as a reason, and that there is (D) an explanation of an action in terms of *good* or *normative* reasons if and only if the action is explained and rationalized by the agent's taking something as a reason which *is* a good or normative reason for the action. On the basis of this, we can then distinguish between four corresponding types of acting for reasons. We may distinguish, for instance, between (A) acting for explanatory reasons, (B) acting for rationalizing reasons, (C) an agent's acting for reasons, and (D) an agent's acting for good reasons.

Finding the best names for these categories is a matter of terminology. An important substantial question is whether or not there is a real distinction between the categories B and C. Proponents of the desire-belief model will argue that C collapses into a version of B. In particular, proponents of the background version will argue that an agent's reasons just are desired ends in combination with beliefs about what would promote them (a version of B). However, this leads us right back to the problem that we started with: it seems clear that one may perform an action that is explained and rationalized by some of one's desires and beliefs, but for which one sees no reason. If one sees no reason to pursue an end, then one may see no reason to pursue the means either, even if one has a desire for the end and a belief about the means. In other words, what appears to be rational or intelligible in the light of the agent's desires and beliefs may not be something that the agent sees reason to do. Note that there are two possibilities here. The agent may either fail to *see* or fail to *acknowledge* the alleged reason-giving force of the relevant desire-belief combination.[6]

It seems clear that C entails B (being an explanation of type C entails being an explanation of type B and being an action of type C entails being an action of type B). A further substantial question is whether or not C entails a desire-belief version of B. Further below (sections 7 and 10), I will argue that this is not so: explanations and actions of type C are not simply a subset of desire-belief based explanations and actions of type B.

6. Reason-taking

What is it, then, to take something as a reason for action? To begin with, we can break this down into the following three questions. First, when we take something as a reason, do we take it as a particular kind of reason? Second, what kind of things do we take as reasons? What, in other words, are the objects of reason-taking? And third, what kind of mental entity is reason-taking itself? Is it a propositional attitude or does it consist in the possession and manifestation of dispositions?

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[6] One might think that the reason why an agent fails to acknowledge the reason-giving force of a desire-belief combination must be that the agent is *alienated* from the desire, in Frankfurt's (1971) sense. But this need not be the case. To borrow Frankfurt's own example, a willing addict may not see any good reason to take the desired substance without being alienated from the desire itself. Fully aware of acting for no good reason, the willing addict may disown the alleged reason-giving force of the desire, without disowning the desire—as the descriptive name suggests, the agent simply does, voluntarily, what he desires to do.

The first question has already been addressed, and I have suggested that taking something as a reason for an action is to take it as something that favors or recommends, providing some rational justification—to take it, for short, as a *justifying* reason. This assumption is motivated by two considerations. Firstly, it is only plausible and in line with philosophical tradition to suggest that an agent who takes something as a reason acts in the light of something that is taken to favor, recommend, or justify the action—seeing it thereby as something that is worthwhile or good. Secondly, this conception of reason-taking is also in line with the amended version of the desire-belief model, according to which desiring something involves, or consists in, seeing it as desirable. I shall assume this as a starting point for an account of reason-taking, and I shall often omit the qualification: claims about reasons should from now on be understood as claims about justifying reason, unless indicated otherwise.

What are the objects of reason-taking? As already suggested, first-personal reflection on practical reasoning suggests that the objects of reason-taking are *considerations*: the contents or propositions that are considered in practical reasoning (see Darwall 1983, Scanlon 1998, and Setiya 2007). Alternatively, one might suggest that the things that are taken as reasons are *facts* or *states of affairs* (Dancy 2000 and Bittner 2001). However, it seems clear that an agent can take something as a reason irrespectively of whether or not it does in fact obtain. In other words, taking something as a reason need not involve the veridical recognition that a certain fact or state of affairs obtains. But it seems also clear that whatever is taken as a reason for an action is not just something that is *considered*, in the sense in which one may consider a possible course of action or a hypothetical proposition. Not everything that is considered in practical reasoning is taken to be the case, and not everything that is considered is taken as a reason. I propose, however, that if one takes something as a reason, then one takes it to be the case. I propose, in other words, that the objects of reason-taking are things that the agent *takes to be the case*.[7] (This may include, among other things, the likelihood of future events and conditional dependencies: Pete takes an umbrella, because he thinks it is going to rain, and Sue jumps into the river, because she thinks that the child is going to drown, if she doesn't help.)

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[7] Neta (2009) argues that it is rationally permissible to treat *R* as a reason for action only if one knows that *R* (or only if one justifiably believes that one knows that *R*). Note that this claim concerning rational permissibility is a separate issue.

7. Dispositions and attitudes

The remaining third question concerns reason-taking itself. A first thing to note here is that it would be implausible to construe reason-taking as a kind of mental *action*. Taking something as a reason can be an action, just as making a judgment or drawing a conclusion can be an action. But it is implausible to suggest that it is necessarily something that we do. Consider the analogy with judgments, for instance. Many judgments are formed when we are engaged in some kind of activity that does not have their formation as their goal—the formation of those judgments *occurs* as we proceed. Those are genuine judgments, and it seems that active formations of judgments are special cases. For instance, the formation of a judgment can become an activity when there are independent reasons, such as time constraints, to settle a difficult inquiry by making a judgment, or when an agent is motivated to cease the weighing of reasons in order to move on, as it were. The same, I think, holds for reason-taking. I shall therefore assume that the paradigmatic instances of genuine reason-taking are states or events and that instances of active reason-taking are special cases. It would be interesting to see what the difference between a mental process and a mental activity consists in. But this would lead us too far astray. I shall focus, instead, on non-active instances of reason-taking.

The main question here, I think, is whether or not reason-taking consists in the possession of mental attitudes that are *about reasons*. To be more precise, the main question is whether taking something, *R*, as a reason for an action of type *A* consists in the possession of a mental attitude that is about the proposition that *R* is a reason for *A*, or whether it can be explained in terms of the possession and manifestation of mental and behavioral dispositions that do not constitute the possession of a mental attitude with that content.[8] I shall call views that fall under the former category *content accounts*, and views that fall under the latter category *dispositional accounts*.

7.1. Dispositional accounts

One may propose to give an account of reason-taking in terms of desires. In particular, one may propose an account in terms of the kinds of dispositions that are supposed to be

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[8] It might be, of course, that the possession of propositional attitudes that are about reasons can be explained in terms of dispositions. But this is a separate issue. In particular, it might be true that propositional attitudes about reasons can be explained in terms of dispositions, but false that the dispositions that are constitutive of reason-taking are constitutive of propositional attitudes.

constitutive of desires. However, I think that this is approach is, in general, unpromising. Firstly, it seems clear, on intuitive grounds, that one may take something as a reason for *A* without having any desire to *A*. For instance, consider Pete's disposition to help his friend Sue. Suppose that this involves dispositions to take considerations such as that "Sue is a friend" and that "Sue needs help" as reasons for certain actions. It seems that on some occasions Pete may take these considerations as reasons for helping Sue without having any desire to do so. There are, it seems, plenty examples of this kind. Secondly, there are two ways in which one can arrive at such a desire view. Either one begins with an intuitively plausible account of reason-taking, which is then identified as an account of desire. Or one begins with an intuitively plausible account of desire, which is then identified as an account of reason-taking. It is rather unlikely that either one of the two approaches will ever lead to an persuasive outcome, because it is rather unlikely that a plausible account of reason-taking will connect, extensionally, with an intuitively plausible account of desire. That much has become clear in the discussion of the desire-belief model. If one begins with an intuitively plausible account of desire, one does not carve out an account of reason-taking. And if one begins with an intuitively plausible account of reason-taking, one can identify this only with a technical notion of desire. This latter approach results in a stipulative definition of desire and in an identity claim that is unmotivated and explanatorily vacuous, because no insight is gained by identifying desires with reason-taking dispositions in this way—it would make more sense to call these dispositions *reason-taking dispositions*, or so, rather than desires.

But perhaps this general rebuttal misses something. Let us consider some concrete proposals. According to Scanlon's prominent view, what is 'generally called a desire involves having a tendency to see something as a reason' (1998: 39), and he has proposed the following 'directed-attention' account:

> A person has a desire in the directed-attention sense that P if the thought of P keeps occurring to him or her in a favorable light, that is to say, if the person's attention is directed insistently toward considerations that present themselves as counting in favor of P. (ibid.)

Note that this would be uninformative as an account of reason-taking, because the phenomenon of a consideration's *presenting itself* as counting *in favor* of something (that is, as being a reason for something) is precisely what is in need of explanation. But it is not intended to be an account of reason-taking. It is intended to be an account of desire in terms of reason-taking. As such, however, it is implausible. It seems clear, firstly, that one can have the desire that *p* without daydreaming about *p* in this directed-attention sense. Secondly, it seems clear that an agent can be attracted to something without taking anything to count in its favor—think, for instance, of the desires of young children or non-human agents (see Mele 2003: 78). This confirms my claim that a stipulative identification of desire with reason-taking will most probably result in an implausible account of desire.

Alternatively, one may propose to explain reason-taking in terms of a dispositional account of the functional interaction between desires and beliefs. On this view, having a desire consists, very roughly, in the possession of dispositions to act in accordance with what one takes to be the means to one's ends (Smith 1987, for instance). However, this approach is still subject to the objection that one may not see any reason to pursue what one takes to be the appropriate means, because one may not see any reason to pursue the end.

Mark Schroeder (2007) has also proposed a directed-attention account of desire that seems to address this problem. In normal cases, so Schroeder, the considerations that one takes as reasons are considerations about the means to one's ends that strike one with a 'certain kind of *salience*', in the sense that 'you find yourself thinking about them' when you think about the action (156). Perhaps this kind of salience is missing in cases where the agent fails to see the reason-giving force of the consideration that a certain action would promote a desired end.

This, however, cannot provide a solution to the problem. Consider George, who finds himself from time to time with racist thoughts during practical reasoning—thoughts about ends and thoughts about actions that would promote them. But whenever those thoughts come up in practical reasoning, George dismisses them, as they are incompatible with his evaluative beliefs. Given this, it is plausible to suppose that George never takes the racist considerations as reasons in his own practical reasoning. The problem remains. We are looking for an account of what it is to take something as a reason. The fact that a consideration about what would promote a desired end strikes one as salient, draws one's

attention, or presents itself, may be part of it. But it is not sufficient for seeing or taking it as a reason, because one may not see any good reason to pursue the end. In practical reasoning, all kinds of considerations may be salient in the sense that one finds oneself thinking them, including considerations about means to desired ends. But the fact that they are salient does not guarantee that one takes them as reasons.

Finally, any account of reason-taking in terms of desire-belief combinations is subject to the following regress problem. It has been argued, convincingly I think, that reasons for means are dependent on the reasons for the end. If there is no reason to pursue the end, then there is no reason to take the means either (Scanlon 1998, Broome 1999 and Dancy 2000, for instance). Given this, any account of acting for reasons should be able to account for an agent's taking something as a reason for an end E, such that this reason does not depend on a further reason for some further end—such that this reason does not consist in E's being the *means* to some further end E^*. Otherwise, we would face a regress of reasons for ends. Candidates for independent (that is, non-instrumental) reasons for ends are the value of expected consequences and considerations about types of action (that to A would be to break a promise, for instance). A content account of reason-taking can easily accommodate reasons of this kind, whereas the desire-belief approach cannot—at least not in any obvious and unproblematic manner.

7.2. Content accounts

According to content accounts, reason-taking consists basically in the possession of beliefs, or belief-like attitudes, about what counts as a reason for doing what (see Scanlon 1998: 58–64).[9] We can distinguish between different versions of this view. According to a first version, taking something as a reason consists in having an *occurrent* belief about the reason. This is too strong. It seems clear that we can take something as a reason, and act for it, without having an occurrent attitude about its status as a reason. To the contrary, it seems clear that the concept of a reason hardly ever enters the contents of practical reasoning. One might think that this is less clear if the concept of a reason is analyzed. For instance, on Scanlon's analysis, to take R as a reason for A is to take it that R *favors* A (ibid.: 17).

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[9] According to Scanlon, reason-taking can be construed either in terms of beliefs about reasons or in terms of special desire-like attitudes. He argues that nothing of substance depends on which account one chooses, but he also says that he favors the belief account (1998: 59).

However, ask yourself, how often do explicit thoughts or contents about what favors what enter reasoning about what to do? The answer, I think, is: not very often. One must, of course, distinguish here between occurrent and dispositional attitudes. It is one thing to claim that taking *R* as a reason for *A* requires that one is disposed to assent to the proposition that *R* favors *A*. But it is another and much stronger thing to claim that taking *R* as a reason for *A* consists in having the occurrent belief that *R* favors *A*. The same, I think, holds for any other analysis or characterization of reasons, simply because we usually reason *with* reasons, not *about* them.

According to a second version, reason-taking consists in the possession of a dispositional belief about the reason. Here, we should be careful not to conflate different kinds of dispositional belief. Consider the following distinction. Let us say that an agent *S* has the dispositional belief that *p* if *S* is disposed to assent to the proposition that *p*, and that *S* has the *considered* dispositional belief that *p* only if it is also the case that *S* has at least once reflectively considered the proposition that *p* and assented to it. Given this distinction, one can be disposed to assent to *p* without having the considered belief that *p* (but not *vice versa*).

According to Scanlon, reason-taking consists in considered beliefs. Initially, he suggests, something presents itself as a reason—something *seems* to be a reason. But we take it as a reason only when we form the belief that it really is a reason after some reflection on its status as a reason (ibid.: 65–66). This version of the view is also too strong. When we find ourselves in a novel situation, for instance, we may take something as a reason for an action, and be fully aware of it, without having ever reflected on its rational authority, and without having ever assented to the corresponding proposition upon reflection. It may simply strike us as self-evident that it is a good reason for the action. At the opposite extreme, the practice of taking something as a reason may be so ordinary and deeply ingrained in our social and cultural identities that we never reflect on it. Further, it seems that children and adolescents frequently take things as reasons without having considered beliefs about their status as reasons. Given all this, it is implausible to suggest that reason-taking consists, in general, in the possession of the relevant considered dispositional beliefs.

According to a third version, reason-taking may consist in the possession of dispositional beliefs that are not considered. It seems that this view faces similar problems as the desire-belief model, because it seems that an agent may not endorse, upon reflection, what he or she is disposed to assent to. Return to George and let us assume now that he is disposed to assent to racist claims, including racist propositions that appear to provide reasons for action (such as that "Africans are not to be trusted"). But George does not reflectively endorse such racist claims, as they are incompatible with his considered evaluative beliefs. We may suppose that his disposition to assent to racist propositions is not responsive to his considered judgments because he has acquired them during the formative years of childhood. Further, we may suppose that George has never assented to those propositions upon reflection. Given all this, it may well be the case that George never takes those racist considerations as reasons for action—he may, in other words, never act in the light of those racist considerations.[10]

This problem can be avoided, if the relevant dispositions are specified in the right way. What I shall propose here is based on an idea that lies at the core of Anscombe's (1957) account of intentional action. That is the idea that giving the reasons for which an agent performs an action is to give answers to certain why-questions—in particular, answers that the agent would give in response to certain why-questions. This, I think, provides a promising starting point for a reformulation. On this view, reason-taking consists in the possession of dispositions to give certain considerations in response to certain why-questions. Provided that an agent's reasons are things that the agent takes as justifying reasons, we can say that the relevant why-questions are questions that ask for justifying reasons (for the action in question). So, what I propose, to a first approximation, is the following: taking R as a reason for A consist in the possession of the disposition to give R in response to questions that ask for considerations that favor, recommend, or justify A.

Our problem was that it may be false that one takes R as a reason for A even if it is true that one is disposed to assent to the proposition that R is a reason for A. This problem

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[10] It may nevertheless be true that George's racist dispositions influence some of his judgments and actions, and it may be true that he is aware of that. It may even be true that George's dispositions to assent to racist considerations *rationalize* some of his judgments and actions, and he may be aware of that as well—and yet it may be false that he takes those considerations as reasons for action.

is now avoided. If the agent is disposed to *give R* in response to questions that ask for justifying reasons for *A*, then it is hard to deny that the agent takes *R* to be a reason for *A*. Return to the example, and assume now that George is not only disposed to assent to racist propositions, but that he is also disposed to give them in order to justify racist actions. Given this, it seems clear now that George does take it that the racist considerations are reasons for action.

Note that this view is closer to a dispositional account than the previous ones, because it construes reason-taking in terms of dispositions to *give* certain considerations as reasons. Nevertheless, even if an agent does not have the considered belief that *R* is a reason for *A*, he or she can still be said to have a propositional attitude about the reason by virtue of being disposed to give *R* as a reason for *A*. Given this, it is still a version of the content account—although it would be equally plausible to call it a hybrid view.

One obvious problem with this dispositional version of the content account is that it fails to capture what it is to take something as a reason during practical reasoning, because it refers only to the possession of dispositions. It seems that in order to capture what it is to *take* something as a reason during practical reasoning, we must refer to some kind of *occurrent* mental state or event in addition to the possession of dispositions.

8. An account of reason-taking

I will now propose an account of reason-taking which is based, to a large extent, on the considerations and conclusions of the previous sections. The last point was that the notion of reason-taking is ambiguous. Reason-taking may be an occurrent mental state or event that precedes or accompanies decisions and actions; it may be a standing or dispositional mental attitude; or it may consist in both. In order to make the distinction clearer, let me first introduce the following broad notion of practical reasoning. Let us say that practical reasoning is any kind of mental process in which the agent considers reasons for actions and which concerns—or which is directed at—the agent's own agency. In other words, in practical reasoning the agent does not only consider what reasons *there are*, but the agent considers what reasons *to act upon*. Let us call instances in which the agent considers or sees only *one* reason for (or against) one action *non-deliberative* cases of practical reasoning. And let us call all other instances that involve the consideration and perhaps

weighing of more than one reason *deliberative* cases. The important point is that practical reasoning, so construed, may not involve an inferential step or chain of reasoning. Rather, it may consist simply in taking one consideration as a reason (for or against one action).

Given this, we can then say that according to one notion of reason-taking, taking something as a reason for action is constitutive of practical reasoning. According to a second notion, taking something as a reason is not, and may never be, constitutive of the agent's practical reasoning—it may consist, instead, in the possession of a standing or dispositional attitude. One may, for instance, be disposed to give *R* as a reason for *A* in discussion with others without being disposed to take *R* as a reason for *A* in one's own practical reasoning (perhaps because one has the former disposition only because one knows that *R* is a socially accepted reason). As a result, one may give *R* as a reason for *A* on certain occasions, but never take *R* as a reason for *A* in one's own practical reasoning. We will return to both notions in due course. Note, for now, that we are interested primarily in the first notion, because we are interested in the question of what it is to act for reasons.

In the discussion of the desire-belief model, I noted that its causal dimension is a favorable feature. It explains the motivational efficacy of reasons for action—it explains, partly at least, what it is to act *for* reasons.[11] I shall assume that the efficacy of taking something as a reason in practical reasoning is also to be explained in terms of causal efficacy. Suppose that *S* performs the action *A* for the reason *R*, because *S* takes *R* as a reason for *A*. It seems clear that *S* performs the action for the reason *R* only if taking *R* as a reason motivates and explains the action. In accordance with the causal approach, I shall assume that this is true only if taking *R* as a reason plays a causal role in the performance of *A*. What if *S* decides not to *A*? Suppose that *S* decides to *B* because, after considering *R*, *S* considered a stronger reason in favor of *B*-ing. It is plausible to assume that taking *R* as a reason played nevertheless a causal role that was *directed at A*-ing: whatever the decision, the consideration of *R* moved *S* towards *A*-ing. I shall call this the *objective component* of reason-taking, and I shall say that taking *R* as a reason for *A* *disposes the agent to A*.

It was also suggested, implicitly, that taking something as a reason during practical reasoning has a subjective component. This consists, roughly, in the agent's awareness of

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[11] Davidson 1963, Goldman 1970, Bishop 1989, Enç 2003 and Mele 2003, for instance. I have defended the causal theory in Schlosser 2010a and 2011.

taking something as a reason for an action. However, I argued that taking *R* as a reason does not require an occurrent mental attitude with the content that *R* is a reason (which includes, I take it, any kind of representation or awareness of *R* as being a reason for the action). But how can we then account for the agent's taking *R as a reason*?

A similar problem arises for accounts of the epistemic basing relation (roughly, the relation between beliefs and the reasons that support them). It has been suggested that, when we form a belief on the basis of reasons, we have a non-conceptual awareness of the fact that the reasons support it (Moser 1989, for instance). But it is difficult to see how this is even possible. How could one have a non-conceptual awareness of one thing supporting another *as* a justifying reason? How could one have a non-conceptual representation or awareness *that* one thing favors, recommends or justifies another? We should acknowledge, I think, that there can be no such awareness (see Bergmann 2006).

I propose, instead, that the subjective component can consist simply in an awareness of the objective component: an awareness of the fact that considering *R* disposes one to *A*. This does not require a direct awareness of causal relations, as the subjective component may itself be produced by a causal mechanism that represents or tracks the objective component without providing access to its causal workings. I presume, then, that the subjective component may not be veridical. It may seem to one that *R* disposes one towards *A*-ing, when this is not the case, and the degree to which one seems to be moved may not correspond to the strength of the actual causal influence.

The subjective component involves a representation of the reason and the action. There is some reason to think that representations of actions need not be conceptual, as they can be represented in a *motor format*. On this view, types of action can be represented by means of the same mechanisms that are involved in the performance of those actions—by means of 'motor simulation' (Jeannerod 2006). Given this, the agent may indeed have a sense of being *moved* towards *A*-ing. But for most cases it seems more appropriate to describe this awareness in terms of directed attention: one is aware that considering *R* disposes one to *A* in the sense that considering *R* directs one's attention at *A*-ing or evokes a representation of *A*-ing.[12]

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[12] An appeal to a notion of directed attention can be found in Moser 1989, Scanlon 1998, and Schroeder 2007. However, their uses of this notion differ from each other, and they differ from the use proposed here.

How is *R* represented? I suggested that an agent who takes *R* as a reason, takes *R* to be the case. This may consist in the occurrent belief that *R* (construed, perhaps, as conscious assent to the corresponding proposition). But I think that this is not necessary, especially in non-deliberative cases where the agent has to act swiftly in response to a representation of *R*. I shall therefore assume that a *seeming* is sufficient: *S* takes *R* to be the case if it seems to *S* that *R*.

Taken together, the objective and the subjective component do not yet capture what it is to take something as a reason. As indicated, I propose that the missing element is not to be found in the agent's subjective mental state, but in dispositions to give considerations as reasons in response to certain why-questions: questions that ask for considerations that favor, recommend, or justify the action. I shall rephrase this proposal once more, because the circumstances in which we give reasons are not restricted to situations in which specific why-questions are addressed at us. I shall say, rather, that we take something as a reason by virtue of being disposed to give it as a reason in *normative discussion*, which includes, roughly, all situations in which we explain, justify, or simply discuss our actions by giving justifying reasons. Sometimes this occurs in response to being questioned or challenged by others. But normative discussion may also consist in reflective discussions "with oneself", as it were.

Further, I shall assume that dispositions to give considerations as reasons are *defeasible*. When asked to explain and justify an action, prompted thereby to reflect on it, one may realize that what one took as a reason is no good reason for the action at all. One might then feel embarrassed to give it as one's reason, one might withhold it, and one might lose the disposition to give it as a reason. Nevertheless, I submit that one takes something as a reason only if one is, for the time being, disposed to give it as a reason in normative discussion.[13]

Given that these dispositions are defeasible, they cannot be analyzed in terms of simple counterfactuals about overt behavior. In particular, the fact that *S* is disposed to give *R* as a reason in normative discussion cannot be reduced to the fact that *S* would give *R*, if *S*

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[13] I have borrowed the term *normative discussion* from Gibbard 1990. According to Gibbard, normative discussion must be unconstrained (74–75). This is not required on my view, as constraints such as social pressure or intimidation are among the conditions that may interfere with the manifestation of dispositions to give reasons.

were prompted to give reasons for *A* in normative discussion. What comes closer is the counterfactual that *S* would think about *R*, if *S* were prompted to give reasons for *A* in normative discussion. But even this is defeasible—all sorts of things can disrupt the manifestation of a disposition.

Without attempting a reduction or an analysis, we can, however, say the following.[14] Having the relevant disposition to give something as a reason in normative discussion explains what it is to see it *as a reason* because one is thereby disposed to give it in response to questions that ask for considerations that favor, recommend, or justify. The important point is that one may be disposed to give something as a reason without possessing a considered belief concerning its status as a reason—without having ever assented, upon reflection, to the proposition that it is a reason. This is perfectly plausible, as we begin to see and give things as reasons as a result of upbringing, imitation, and socialization, rather than reflective assent to their rational authority.

Note, finally, that the disposition to give something as a reason in normative discussion rationalizes the objective component. It seems clear that this should not be a coincidence: when *S* takes *R* to be the case, and when this disposes *S* to *A*, then it should be the case that this disposes *S* to *A because S* is disposed to give *R* as a reason. It seems therefore only plausible to assume, again in accord with a causal approach, that the agent's disposition to give the reason in normative discussion must be causally explanatory of the objective component. Given all this, I propose the following account of what it is to take something as a reason for action in practical reasoning:

> *S* takes *R* as a reason for *A* in practical reasoning if and only if
> (1) *S* takes *R* to be the case,
> (2) Taking *R* to be the case disposes *S* to *A*,
> (3) *S* is aware of the fact that taking *R* to be the case disposes her to *A*,
> (4) *S* is disposed to give *R* as a reason for *A* in normative discussion, and
> (5) 4 is a non-deviant cause of 2.[15]

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[14] There is good and independent reason to think that dispositions cannot be analyzed in terms of conditionals. For overviews see Fara 2005 and Schlosser 2011, for instance.

[15] Provided that dispositions are *states*, they are not causally efficacious events. But they can be causally relevant, and we can construe them as being *structuring causes* (see Dretske 1988).

This account appeals to the notion of *non-deviant* causation. It is a difficult task to explain what this involves. Elsewhere I have argued that a causal chain is non-deviant if each of its segments consists in the manifestation of what I have called a *rationalizing disposition*. I cannot go into any of the details of this account here, as this would lead us too far astray. Suffice it to say that the disposition in 4 is of the right kind: it rationalizes 2. For more on this see Schlosser 2011.

An obvious complication arises for cases in which the agent is already settled on doing A. If the agent has already decided to A, then taking R as a reason may have no effect on the agent's disposition to A. One possible solution is to restrict the scope of the account to cases in which the agent is undecided (concerning the question of whether or not to A). Alternatively, we could qualify 2 as follows: taking R to be the case either disposes S to A or it causally sustains S's disposition to A, such that taking R to be the case would have disposed S to A (had S not already decided to A). Accordingly, 4 would have to be a cause of whichever disjunct of this amended version of 2 obtains.

This is an account of what it is to take something as a reason *for* an action in practical reasoning. Sometimes we take something as a reason *against* an action; sometimes we *weigh* the reasons for and against an action; and sometimes we consider and weigh the reasons for and against more than one course of action. This adds further levels of complexity that are beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that the offered account can be used as a starting point for an account of what it is to take something as a reason against an action, and that it provides a plausible starting point for an account of what it is to weigh reasons for and against an action.

Further, there are occasions where an agent is not only disposed to give R as a reason, but where the agent is aware of R's rational authority in practical reasoning. That is, the agent's awareness of R, in taking R as a reason for A, may involve a representation of R as a justifying reason for A. This can be distinguished, furthermore, from the reflective and considered judgment that R is a justifying reason for A. If an instance of reason-taking involves an explicit awareness or a considered judgment about R's status as a reason, we obtain more robust types of reason-taking. It varies, from agent to agent, how many instances of reason-taking are more robust, in either sense, depending on how reflective an agent is. And for individual agents this will change over time. Often, we first find ourselves

with a disposition to give and take something as a reason, and later we endorse this on reflection with a considered judgment. In other cases, we may acquire a disposition to give and take something as a reason in response to judging that it is a reason. A fully rational agent would lose any reason-taking disposition in response to an opposing judgment, and it seems plausible to assume that an agent is a *rational* agent only if that agent's reason-taking dispositions are at least to some extent responsive to the relevant judgments.

When we ask why an agent was taking something as a reason, we might not be able to refer, truthfully, to an awareness or judgment concerning its status as a reason. Taking *R* as a reason for *A* may consist solely in the possession and manifestation of the relevant dispositions: the manifestation of a disposition to be moved to *A* in response to taking *R* to be the case; the manifestation of a disposition to become aware of this; and the possession of a disposition to give *R* as a reason for *A* in normative discussion. It may, for short, consist solely in the manifestation of a disposition to take *R* as a reason for *A*. A more informative explanation of why the agent was taking *R* as a reason may be gained from an explanation of why the agent has acquired the underlying dispositions. But an explanation in terms of an explicit awareness or considered judgment about the reason may not to be had. I take this to be a favorable feature for the reasons given above (section 7.2).

9. Acting for reasons

Given this account of reason-taking, the following account of what it is for an agent to act for a reason (category C, and possibly D, as distinguished in section 5) suggests itself:

> *S* performs *A* for the reason *R* if and only if
> (1)   *S* takes *R* as a reason for *A*,
> (2)   *S* performs *A*, and
> (3)   Taking *R* as a reason for *A* is a non-deviant cause of *S*'s *A*-ing.

As pointed out, the notion of reason-taking is ambiguous. So it seems that this account requires disambiguation. It would be too strong to require that acting for reasons must be based on reason-taking in practical reasoning, because many habitual actions that are done for reasons are not preceded by practical reasoning. It should be noted here that actions can be more or less habitual—there are degrees of automaticity in acting for reasons. Compare

the following two cases. Suppose that Sue stops because the traffic lights are red, and that Pete locks the door when he leaves the house. In the first case, it is plausible to suppose that Sue consciously notices something that she takes as a reason for stopping (the red lights). Pete, in contrast, may not notice or consider anything that he takes as a reason for locking the door. In the first case, the reason-taking may be partly habitual, whereas in the second case it may be fully habitual.

One might think that in both cases the agent is acting for a reason only if the possession of the habit is suitably related to past occasions in which the agent took the relevant considerations as reasons in practical reasoning—only if either the acquisition or the sustainment of the habit can be explained in this way. But I think that this is not necessary. Return to the examples. Both Sue and Pete may have acquired the relevant habit at a young age and without acting on the basis of reasoning in which the relevant considerations were taken as reasons. They may have been able, at that age, to give the relevant considerations as reasons in normative discussion. But they may have started to act in accordance with those considerations not because they took them as reasons in their own practical reasoning, but because they simply started doing what they were told to do. As noted above, such a conformity should not be coincidental. In particular, their dispositions to give the relevant considerations as reasons in normative discussion should be causally explanatory of their actions. I propose that if the relevant dispositions are causally explanatory, then their actions are done for reasons, irrespectively of whether or not they have ever taken the relevant considerations as reasons in their own practical reasoning.

Note, further, that it is implicit in the proposed account that the performance of the action is intentional. According to one plausible and well-established theory, causation and guidance by an intention is sufficient for intentional action (Brand 1984, Bratman 1987, Bishop 1989, Mele & Moser 1994, and Enç 2003, for instance). Given this, I propose to qualify the account as follows:

S performs *A* for the reason *R* if and only if

(1)   *S* takes *R* as a reason for *A*: either

    (a) *S* takes *R* as a reason for *A* in practical reasoning, or

    (b) *S* is disposed to give *R* as a reason for *A* in normative discussion,

(2)   *S* has the intention to *A*,

(3)   *S* performs *A*,

(4)   Either 1a or 1b is a non-deviant cause of the intention to *A*, and

(5)   The intention to *A* non-deviantly causes and guides *S*'s *A*-ing.[16]

Again, I shall put aside the issue of non-deviant causation, under the assumption that the causal relations in 4 and 5 involve manifestations of the right kind of dispositions (see above). The disjunctions in 1 and 4 must be interpreted as non-exclusive as 1a entails 1b, according to the account of reason-taking in practical reasoning. Further, in order to accommodate cases in which *S* already has an intention to *A*, we should allow that the causal relation required in 4 can be a relation of causal sustainment, such that either 1a or 1b, or both, either cause or causally sustain the intention to *A* in a non-deviant manner.

10. Desires and motivation

The proposed view does not exclude an explanatory or motivating role for desires, but their role is not as important and not as central as on a desire-belief model. A detailed account of the possible roles of desires is beyond the scope of this paper, partly because this would require the defense of a theory of desire—a difficult task that is beyond the scope of this paper. But further reflection on some examples will support some suggestions.

Let us consider an example of the kind that is commonly used in order to illustrate and support the desire-belief model. Suppose that Joe goes to the fridge in order to get, say, a Martini. It seems clear that Joe is acting for a reason, and it seems clear that this involves a desire. The latter claim admits of different interpretations. Suppose, firstly, that Joe has an *occurrent* desire for a Martini. On the view that I have proposed, the agent's reasons are the things that the agent takes as reasons. In the present example, there are two obvious candidates for this: the consideration that there is Martini in the fridge and that drinking Martini will be pleasurable. As mentioned, there is good reason to think that reasons for

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[16] Strictly speaking, it is too strong to require that the intention to *A* must cause *S*'s *A*-ing. If *A* is a non-basic action, then *S* performs *A* by performing some basic action *B*. The relation between *A*-ing and *B*-ing may involve causation or some other type of *act-generation* (see Goldman 1970 and Enç 2003). But for any type of act-generation, the intention to *A* must non-deviantly cause an intention to *B*, and this intention to *B* must non-deviantly cause and guide *S*'s *B*-ing. For basic actions, the notion of guidance can be construed either in terms of sustaining causation or in terms of causal feedback loops. For non-basic actions, guidance can be construed in terms of a *match* between the type of action and the agent's action-plan (which is part of the intention's content). For more on these issues see, for instance, Bishop 1989 and Mele & Moser 1994.

means are dependent on and provided by the reasons for ends. Given this, we can assume that Joe's reason for going to the fridge is provided by the consideration that drinking Martini will be pleasurable. Call this consideration *M*. What role does the occurrent desire play in Joe's taking *M* as a reason? It is implausible to think that the desire is Joe's reason for taking *M* as a reason. As pointed out, desires do usually not come into view from the agent's perspective. Given this, the desire is not the *agent's reason* for anything. Moreover, the reason for going to the fridge is provided by the expected pleasure. But one does not need, and one does not usually have, a *further* reason to take that as a reason.

There are, I think, two plausible candidates for the role of the desire. Firstly, it seems plausible to suggest that the occurrence of the desire helps to explain the *token* of Joe's taking *M* as a reason (at that particular moment in time). In particular, we may think of the occurrent desire as being one of the stimulus conditions of Joe's disposition to take *M* as a reason. Secondly, it seems plausible to suggest that the token of Joe's taking *M* as a reason is constitutive, partly perhaps, of the desire. It may be, for instance, that tokens of reason-taking are constitutive of occurrent desires in combination with certain feelings (such as thirst, for instance), or it may be that some tokens of reason-taking are constitutive of occurrent desires due to their salience, attention-drawing intensity, frequency, or so. In any case, note that types of reason-taking are here not identified with types of desires. This is important because it seems possible that an agent may instantiate the former without instantiating the latter. For instance, consider a scenario in which Joe goes for drinks with his colleagues in order to celebrate a business deal. It is perfectly possible that Joe takes *M* as a reason for ordering a Martini on this occasion without having a desire for a Martini, or even without having any desire for a drink.

Let us now turn to cases in which Joe's desire is not an occurrent mental state or event. One possibility is that it is a *standing* desire. Consider, first, an example where the attribution of a standing desire is very plausible. Suppose that Alinka wants to become a famous and respected writer. There are things that she would not take as reasons and things that she would not do, if she did not have that desire. She reads and studies literature. She goes to evening classes. She sees reasons to do these things, and it is plausible to think that she would not see these reasons, if she did not have that desire. It seems only plausible to call this a standing desire, and it seems that this desire helps to explain why Alinka takes

certain things as reasons. Note, however, that even in this case it is likely that the standing desire explains the reason-taking only partly. If Alinka did not have the desire, she would not consider and take certain things as reasons. But it is probably also true of her that she would not take these things as reasons if she did not appreciate literary quality and achievement or if she did not see something valuable in becoming a writer.

Joe's case is rather different. There is no obvious reason to attribute a relevant standing desire. Joe might have an occurrent desire for a Martini. Or he might act out of habit (the habit, say, of having a drink after work). If he is acting out of habit, then it might be that he takes certain things as reasons as part of enacting that habit. Not every habit, I take it, involves a standing desire. If he acts out of habit, then it is at least possible that he does not possess any relevant standing desire. Of course, Joe might possess a standing desire for drinks or Martinis. But nothing in the description of the example demands the attribution of such a desire.

Can reference to desires explain why an agent is disposed to take something as a reason? The most straightforward explanation would here be provided by type-identities. However, I have already argued that the identification of reason-taking dispositions with desires is implausible, and habitual actions provide more counterexamples. Every day we perform many habitual actions for reasons, but without having any apparent desire to perform them. Even Joe's actions in the pursuit of a Martini may be pure habit, neither accompanied by an occurrent desire nor motivated by a standing desire. Moreover, it is questionable that even the acquisition and possession of a disposition such as Joe's disposition to take M (the expected pleasure of drinking Martini) as a reason is best explained in term of desires. When he first tried a Martini, he may not have had a desire for a Martini or even for a drink. Perhaps he drank that first Martini just because someone suggested that he should try. If so, then he probably acquired the disposition to take M as a reason not because he acquired a desire for drinking Martini, but because he discovered that he *likes* drinking Martini.[17] In fact, for many of our dispositions to take certain things as reasons, the best explanation of why we have acquired them may be provided in terms of

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[17] For empirical evidence in support of the distinction between wanting and liking see Robinson & Berridge 2003. They argue that the neural "wanting" system can be dissociated from the neural "liking" system.

upbringing, socialization, various kinds of learning, or in terms of judgments about what there is reason to do.

To summarize, both occurrent and standing desires can be partly explanatory of reason-taking, and reason-taking dispositions may be constitutive of desires. But taking something as a reason and acting for it may, as I have argued, neither constitute nor involve any kind of desire. The main point here is the following. We have seen that reason-taking dispositions are operative across a variety of different kinds of cases. It emerged also that different types of desire play different roles in different cases and that this cuts across the class of actions that are based on reason-taking in various ways. It emerged, that is, that the relationship between reason-taking and desire is rather complex and that a general identification or reduction would therefore be implausible.

What about motivation, then? Does taking something as a reason always motivate? What does the motivation consist in? What is its source? The most plausible suggestion here is that the motivational force of reason-taking consists in its objective causal components. Given this, it follows, on my view, that reason-taking is always motivationally efficacious, because the objective causal component is necessary for genuine reason-taking. It should be noted that this does not mean that seeing a reason to *A* entails being motivated to *A*, because it is possible, on the proposed view, that one judges that something is a reason for an action without ever taking it as a reason. But it is also possible, of course, that practical judgments are, as a matter of fact, always motivating.

11. Objections and Replies

Before concluding, I shall briefly address two objections that will help me to add some more clarifications. The first objection consists in Michael Smith's argument for the Humean theory of motivation, according to which all actions are necessarily motivated by desires. Given that all actions are based on motivating reasons, the Humean theory follows from the following three premises (Smith 1987: 55):

(1) Having a motivating reason is, *inter alia*, having a goal,
(2) Having a goal is being in a state with which the world must fit, and
(3) Being in a state with which the world must fit is desiring.

Smith defines a motivating reason to *A* as a state that is *potentially explanatory* of the agent's *A*-ing (ibid.: 38). Presumably this means that, according to the first premise, having a motivating reason to *A* is, *inter alia*, having a goal that is potentially explanatory of *A*-ing. On the view that I have proposed, the motivation of action by reason-taking is a two-stage process. The first stage involves dispositions that are constitutive of reason-taking, and the second stage involves dispositions that are constitutive of the functional role of intentions. Employing Smith's definition, the first stage is constitutive of having a motivating reason, because reason-taking is potentially explanatory of action: reason-taking could result in action by way of the formation of an intention. However, it is false that being in the first stage entails having a goal that is potentially explanatory of the agent's *A*-ing, because it is possible, and likely, that the agent *acquires* that goal *by forming the intention*. The first stage may result in the formation of an intention, which would, *inter alia*, be the formation of a goal that is potentially explanatory of *A*-ing. But it does not follow, and there is no obvious reason to think, that the agent must already have that goal before the intention is formed. This shows that the first premise does not hold for the view that I have proposed.[18]

It should be noted that the rejection of the Humean theory is compatible with the claim that both *being motivated to* A and *doing* A *intentionally* entail that *one wants to* A, in a suitably broad sense of "to want to". This conceptual claim does not entail the metaphysical thesis that there is one type of mental state that underlies all instances of motivation and intentional agency. In other words, one can coherently hold that motivation and intentional agency entail that the agent wants something and deny that all instances of motivation and intentional agency require the presence of one and the same type of mental state with one and the same functional role (namely, desire).

According to a second objection, the view that I have proposed is too demanding. It seems clear that the behavior of young children can be explained in terms of reasons well before they acquire or develop the ability to take things as justifying reasons. In particular, they can act for good reasons well before they can give reasons in normative discussion. Likewise, it seems that many non-human animals can be said to act for reasons even though they neither give nor take things as justifying reasons.

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[18] Similar points can be found in Wallace 1990 and Setiya 2007.

I have distinguished between four types of reason explanations and four corresponding types of acting for reasons. Given this, I can acknowledge that the actions of non-human agents and, say, three-year-olds can be explained in terms of reasons and that they can be done for reasons—in more than one sense, in fact. Further, when non-human agents and three-year-olds act for reasons they may get it wrong in the sense that they may pursue means that are not conducive to their ends. This means that they are able to act for *good* reasons in the sense that they can perform actions that are, in fact, good means to their ends. However, it also seems clear that *we*, mature human agents, are able to act for reasons in more robust ways. We may take ourselves to be justified in taking certain means to certain ends, and we may take ourselves to be justified in pursuing those ends. Non-human agents do not possess these abilities, and three-year-olds have not yet acquired or developed them. For all I know, these distinctions *are* real, and this suffices, I think, in response.

Where does this leave us with the question of what it is to act for reasons? I have argued that acting on the basis of what one takes to be a reason cannot be reduced to acting on the basis of desire-belief combinations, and I have pointed out that one may be mistaken in what one takes as a reason. Given this, it makes sense to reserve the locution that "an agent is acting for reasons" to cases in which the agent takes something as a reason, and it also makes sense to reserve the locution that "an agent is acting for good reasons" to cases in which the agent correctly takes something as a good reason. This *makes sense*, I claim, but one may just as well choose different terms here. This is not a problem as long as it is acknowledged that the disagreement is merely about the terminology—as long as it is acknowledged that the underlying distinctions are real.

12. Conclusion

I have proposed an account of what it is to act for reasons on the basis of an account of what it is to take things as reasons for action, and the latter has been explained, in part, in terms of dispositions to give things as reasons in normative discussion. This view has been motivated mainly by an engagement with rival accounts—in particular, with the familiar desire-belief model. As mentioned at the outset, my aim was not to refute the desire-belief model, but to present a plausible case for an alternative account. So it might seem that the sole motivation for the proposed alternative consists in the fact that there are unresolved

issues with the desire-belief model. But we don't have to see it that way, because the presented arguments and considerations show also, I think, that the proposed alternative account captures an important insight about human agency—the insight that we are creatures of valuation, habit, and social interaction as much as we are creatures of desire.

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