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Subjective and Objective Reasons

1. Introduction

1.1. *Summary*

I claim in this paper that there are only objective reasons and subjective beliefs regarding objective reasons. What is usually called a subjective reason for acting should be understood as the subjective assumption of an objective reason for acting. I defend this claim against reason skepticism by referring: to the motivational force of belief (sec. 2); to the character of prudence and to the relation between desire and action in general (sec. 3); to the plurality of life-world reasons (sec. 4); to reconstructive coherentism regarding reasons (sec. 5) and to the compatibility of agent-relativity and reason objectivism (sec. 6). This argument is at variance with both the Humean belief-desire-theory of rational motivation and the Kantian dichotomy between extramoral subjective reasons (hypothetical imperatives) and objective moral reasons (categorical imperatives).

1.2. *Preliminaries*

(1) Reason-internalism maintains that reasons themselves motivate whereas reason-externalism claims the contrary. This terminology is quite confusing because cognitivist internalism is externalist regarding the (ontologic) interpretation of reasons: cognitivist internalism is opposed to non-cognitivist internalism insofar as for this account (moral) reasons are not something (completely) internal. Instead, they are objective traits of the world that can be detected, understood and known. In a broader sense, cognitivist reason-internalism is one version of externalism in meta-ethics. Because of this possibility to combine ontological externalism with motivational internalism, I shall avoid the terminology of 'internalism vs. externalism'

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as it was initiated by W. D. Falk¹ and W. K. Frankena², and established by Th. Nagel³.

(2) There is a second aspect which speaks against this terminology that is worth being mentioned. It is quite plausible to assume that certain moral judgements express specific beliefs which have an intrinsically motivational force, i. e. those moral judgements which are concerned with one's individual actions and which express the person's sincere normative beliefs. Under favourable circumstances at least the person acts accordingly. But there are many other moral judgements which are not related to the judging person's actions, and quite often not even to anybody's individual action. The normative discourse about political justice is a good example. We can argue for the injustice of a specific tax proposal without direct motivational impact on our own actions or the actions of others, including political agencies. Political justice has its own rationale which is not directly related to actions. The idea that all normative predicates can be reduced - in one way or the other - to those which apply to actions bears the burden of proof and has not much initial plausibility. Evidently this is not to say that aspects of justice are irrelevant for judging political and private actions.

(3) To generalize this observation: Rational motivation is the result of a complex process of deliberation encompassing many different aspects of normative judgement, among which figure justice, self-interest, obligations, individual rights, virtues, institutional settings, conventions etc. If every single normative judgement had direct implications on what ought to be done or was interpreted as an expression of some conative attitude regarding actions, it would hardly be possible to integrate these into a coherent view on what finally ought to be done. Normative dilemmas would be pandemic. Normative cognitivism as advocated here can be understood as a precondition of rationalizing normative discourse. However, if some part of our life world normative discourse is adequately interpreted as having intrinsic motivational force, and some as having none, this again speaks against the use of (reason-)internalism vs. (reason-)externalism as mutually exclusive and together exhaustive categories.

¹ Falk, W. D. (1948), "Ought and Motivation", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 492-510, repr. (1986) in: *Ought, Reasons, and Morality*, Ithaca.

² Frankena, W. K. (1958), "Obligation, Motivation", in A. I. Melden, ed., *Essays in Moral Philosophy*, Seattle.

³ Nagel, Th. (1970), *The Possibility of Altruism*, Princeton.

1.3. *The Claim*

The claim I want to defend in this paper is simple and straightforward: *There are no genuine subjective reasons. There are only objective reasons and subjective beliefs regarding objective reasons.* Some reason objectivists caused confusion in holding that a good objective reason itself can motivate and in fact motivates the reasonable person ex definitione. The evident objection to this claim is: How could a good objective reason itself motivate without being (or becoming) part of the respective persons's motivational set? And in fact it is true that objective reasons have no direct impact on what we do. We act on the basis of what we *think* are good objective reasons. Contrary to reason subjectivism, however, this does not transform objective reasons into subjective preferences. In fact one can use the term *subjective reason* in the sense of *assumed or believed objective reason*. The subjectivity of "subjective" reasons is due to the subjectivity of beliefs. "*P* has a subjective reason to *f*" means "*P* believes that there is a good reason for him to *f*", it does not mean "*P* has a preference for *f*" or some similar formulation transforming subjective reasons into conative attitudes. Beliefs have content. When believing, we believe that something is the case, we refer to what we take to be objective states of affairs. One kind of belief regards objective reasons. Objective reasons constitute one kind of facts. *Subjective reasons are beliefs about normative facts.*

This claim, that there is only one type of reasons and that this type is the one which is sometimes called "objective" or "external", faces criticism from different sides: from those who - in a Humean tradition - maintain that no such reasons exist, that there are only subjective reasons in the sense of motives⁴ (one might call them "reason-skeptics"), and from those who - in a Kantian tradition - believe in a dichotomy of reasons, constituted by the distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives. In this paper, I shall not discuss these theories in detail, instead, I shall present some philosophical arguments which might help to preserve and possibly strengthen the initial plausibility of reason objectivism⁵.

⁴ Cf. Williams, B. (1980), "Internal and External Reasons", in R. Harrison, ed., *Rational Action*, Cambridge, and Williams, B. (1995), *Making Sense of Humanity*, Cambridge, chap. 3.; for a cognitivist Humeanism see Smith, M. (1994), *The Moral Problem*, Oxford and Cambridge, and against: Dancy, J. (1993), *Moral Reasons*, Oxford and Cambridge, chap. 1.

⁵ This initial plausibility is due to our life-world way of practical reasoning, the practice of convincing others that their beliefs concerning reasons are wrong, and being convinced by others, the logical form of practical argument etc. Strong subjectivist tendencies which have dominated 20th century practical philosophy for a long time have undermined this initial plausibility, but it seems to me that

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2. The Motivational Force of Beliefs

The most influential kind of reason skepticism (skepticism against the existence of objective reasons or - in the weaker form - against the practical relevance of objective reasons) stems from a broadly Humean present desire theory of practical rationality.

For the Humean account, there are *two kinds of motivational sources*: desires and beliefs. Desires are intrinsically motivating, whereas beliefs are only extrinsically motivating: Belief without desire has no motivational force. But desire alone (without belief) is also deprived of any impact on action because first we have to know which action will satisfy the desire in order to choose. Both sources are necessary in order to guide action. Sometimes the difference between beliefs and desires as motivational forces is characterized by the direction of fit: beliefs are supposed to fit the world whereas desires aim at making the world fitting⁶. Desire without belief is like a force with a known magnitude but unknown direction. Belief directs desire. It identifies what has to be done in order to satisfy desire. The Humean account restricts rationality to beliefs: Beliefs can rationally be criticized if they do not fit the world. Desires themselves cannot be criticized. Only insofar as some desire is based on wrong beliefs, it can be criticized. Since for the Humean theory it is possible to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger without being irrational⁷, one cannot hope to eliminate what Non-Humeans take to be irrational desires in eliminating irrational beliefs.

For the cognitivist or (normative) objectivist moral judgments express beliefs. Most philosophers believe that this establishes an argument against the view that moral reasons motivate intrinsically. The argument has the following form: Since ordinary beliefs are not intrinsically but only extrinsically motivating, the idea that moral beliefs are intrinsically and not (only) extrinsically motivating would be an assumption ad hoc and bears the burden of proof since it would imply the existence of two kinds of beliefs, those which are intrinsically motivating, and those without intrinsic motivating force. Therefore, it seems justified to suspect that what is taken to be a moral belief is in fact something else, e. g. a specific preference.

philosophical subjectivism is in decline now as the present renaissance of realism - in theoretical and practical philosophy alike - shows.

⁶ Cf. Smith, M. (1994), *The Moral Problem*, Oxford and Cambridge, pp. 111-125.

⁷ Cf. Hume, D. (1739/40), *A Treatise of Human Nature*, London, 2.B "Of the Passions"; Ed. Green/Grose (1909), London, p. 195.

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This argument, however, disregards the fact that ordinary (non-normative) beliefs motivate as well: In many cases they motivate at least to change some other belief. Few philosophers doubt that theoretical reasons - reasons for or against a theoretical assumption - have motivational force. A person who accepts the validity of an argument telling that the assumption *a* is false, is motivated to drop *a*, i. e. to change her belief system accordingly if *a* was part of it before knowing the argument. Sometimes such rational belief revision is something the person is not indifferent to. The new belief might undermine her self-confidence, and very often we do use methods to "protect" ourselves against causally effected changes of belief. In other words, there are cases in which it is up to us to change our beliefs on the basis of some new evidence or argument, and this gives belief revisions the character of genuine actions, i. e. intentionally controlled behaviour.

The new information itself intrinsically motivates to change my belief system. It is highly artificial to rescue the Humean account in saying "There is the desire to have a coherent world view which is intrinsically motivating" or: "It is the motive to be a reasonable person which intrinsically motivates". Although it is true that a reasonable person is intrinsically motivated by reasons, it is not the desire to be reasonable which intrinsically motivates the reasonable person. Non-normative beliefs have an intrinsically motivating force as well. A good theoretical reason for believing *b* is sufficient to incorporate it into one's epistemic system without any additional motivational force or more specifically without any *further* desire.

Reason skeptics maintain that in cases of practical reasoning beliefs are insufficient to motivate, but they accept implicitly (as we all do) that theoretical reasons are sufficient to motivate to revise beliefs. Some rudiments of Aristotelian physics might implicitly be responsible for accepting this asymmetry, such as the view that actions change the world, and every change or move requires some "force" to be effective. Whereas belief revisions do not change the world, they do not correspond to "movements" in the world and therefore do not need any force behind. It goes without saying that a metaphysical foundation like this cannot justify the Humean account.

3. Prudence and the Relation between Desire and Action

The Humean theory of motivation remains intact only if it is possible to discriminate the conative and the epistemic parts of motivation in a way that the conative part is simply given and deliberation can be confined to the epistemic part. The givenness of the conative part of motivation within the Humean account may be explained in

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different ways. One may think of a flow of desires being a result of external stimuli and internal traits, genetic outfit and social conditioning, natural and artificial virtues, calm and violent passions. It remains however crucial for the Humean kind of reason skepticism that the epistemic determinants in this flow can be isolated and reduced to empirical assumptions, and that the remaining "pure" conative parts are not determined by reason at all, that pure desire is not a result of weighing reasons. The desire to *f* which is based on the expectation that *f*-ing will satisfy some of my future desires which I do not have at present, is not a pure desire in this sense.

The argument from prudence as we might call it, which e. g. Thomas Nagel developed in *The Possibility of Altruism* is so forceful against radical reason skepticism because its assumptions are minimal. It does not assume that the reasonable person is morally motivated. It suffices to consider some purely self-oriented interest. The only assumption it implicitly makes is that there is something like intertemporal identity which gives reason to take ones future desires into account. Confronted with the argument from prudence which tells that one can be motivated now without having the respective motivating desire now, because some act performed now can be a good means to fulfill some of one's future desires then, the Humean theory of motivation is forced to present quite an artificial interpretation of core elements of practical rationality⁸. If I know now that I shall be hungry this evening, it is reasonable to go shopping now, because later the store will be closed. It seems that no additional desire is needed to render this action rational: It is rational even if I have no present desire to eat later or any other desire of this kind. Radical reason skeptics have only two possibilities when being confronted with examples like this: To reject that actions like this one are rational - they could be caused by acquired dispositions instead - or to assume a present extra desire which is directed to fulfill the expected later desire of the agent. The first reply is certainly not plausible in all cases in which we take our expected future desires into account, and the second reply results in a complete trivialization of present desire theory of practical rationality because it renders all potential reasons 'desires' - which would imply that the present desire theory of practical rationality turns out to be without content. This trivialization would be at odds with the background theory sketched above using the metaphor of the constant flow of desires.

⁸ In *Kritik des Konsequentialismus* (1993), München, I have argued that there are two aspects which should be kept separate: longterm consequences of action and structural traits of action. Consequentialism confuses both or tries to reduce the latter to the former which is impossible.

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Intertemporal coherence of desires can only be secured by distancing oneself: One does not satisfy one's present desires in order to avoid long-term frustration. Practical rationality, even if understood merely as a device of prudence, is at odds with the optimization of present desires. Even simple, purely self-interested rationality is dependent on the ability not to do what one is most strongly moved to do momentarily. Even the purely self-interested hedonist cannot rely on her present desires. If rational she chooses her actions such that they cohere into a form of life which grants an overall maximum of satisfaction. She will end up miserably if she doesn't reasonably trade off her present and her future desires, and thus guide her action.

It is worth noting that even in the case of the purely self-interested hedonist it is neither desire nor reason alone which moves the agent, but reason balances present and expected future desires, and the resulting act is a function of both desire and reason. For the hedonist, reason is indeed the slave of the passions⁹, but a slave influential enough to disentangle passion and action. For the non-hedonist, reason is more than a means to optimize long term personal satisfaction. But insofar as personal desires give a prima facie reason to satisfy them, it is not reason alone or 'pure practical reason' in a Kantian sense which moves the non-hedonist agent.

The deficiency of present desire theory gives way to a more general action-theoretic insight. As mentioned above, a present desire entails (under normal circumstances) a prima facie reason to perform an action satisfying the desire. But by considering future options and consequences it might become apparent that it would not be reasonable to do what satisfies it, since there might be competing and better reasons to do something else. In general: *Desire is never directly conducive to action*. The connection between desire and action is mediated by the prima facie reason to satisfy my present desires. If it were directly conducive, the person would not act, but only react. It would be a case of mere behaving, not of acting. Acts are the constitutive parts of our behaviour for which we are responsible. Acts are individuated via intention. Intention is based on weighing reasons. Intention is not a causal effect of desire. Reason, action, intention and responsibility are interdependent concepts constituting the core of any adequate theory of practical rationality. In using stoicist vocabulary, one might say that it is the impact of the *logos* which constitutes actions. Acting is different from mere behaving in that acting is accompanied by a specific intentional state of mind. This intentionality constitutive for action differs from desires in being a product of choice. Desires alone do not produce actions. In the marginal

⁹ Cf. Hume, David (1739/40), *Treatise of Human Nature*, B2, London.

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case desires might produce some kind of compulsory behaviour which is not guided by reasons and ipso facto cannot be understood as genuine action. It is analytically true that acting is the result of practical reasoning.

The Kantian theory of action results in a dichotomy of reasons. Those which are based on my personal preferences or desires (*Neigungen*) and those which are based on the respect for the moral law. The first kind of reasons - pragmatic reasons - are heteronomous because based on empirically given personal preferences or desires whereas the second kind of reasons - moral reasons - are autonomous because independent from empirically given personal preferences or desires. Thus the Kantian theory of reasons is half Humean. Free autonomous action accords with the moral law, but acting for other (pragmatic or technical) reasons is heteronomous. There are therefore three - not only two - main paradigms: (1) The first rejects the existence of objective reasons which have an impact on action. It only knows subjective reasons or, in case it concedes the existence, it denies that they could have any impact on action based on their acceptance only. We called this paradigm Humean. (2) The second confines objective reasons to the moral sphere, where alone free and autonomous action is possible. The resulting dichotomy of reasons produces two basically different kinds of actions. We called this paradigm Kantian. (3) The third paradigm only knows objective reasons and subjective beliefs regarding objective reasons. It results in a unified theory of action and reasons. We might call it Stoicist, because it is an essential trait of Stoicist thought to understand actions (as an expression of conative attitudes) as a kind of judgement: *proa...resij kr...sij œstin*.

4. The Plurality of Life-World Reasons

What we personally desire is rarely the only relevant aspect of our practical reasoning. In most cases of practical reasoning we consider a vast plurality of reasons ranging from obligations, duties and commitments to present desires, aims and long-term personal projects. The dichotomy of moral and extra-moral (pragmatic, instrumental) reasons is an invention of modern philosophical thought. Many philosophers - following Kant - identify extra-moral reasons with pragmatic means-ends-rationality. I believe this to be an unacceptable simplification. There is a vast plurality of life-world practical reasons which cannot be caught by this dichotomy.

If I have promised to meet Barbara at the Museum today (*r*), there is a good prima facie reason for going there in time in order to meet Barbara (*f*). Does the given

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promise constitute a moral reason in this case? Is the (prima facie good) reason for *f* an implication of a moral principle, or is it my general attitude to keep promises which has become a constitutive part of my form of life, which renders this promise a reason, or is it a specific aspect of collective (or interactive or communicative) rationality which is responsible for *r* being a reason for *f*? I do not want to exclude any of these or any other possible theoretical options in saying that this question is a *cura posterior*. Outside the philosophical classroom we all agree that *r* is a reason for *f*. And this consensus is to a large degree independent from the possibility to include this concrete reason for action into a general normative theory - be it a theory of morality or rationality - to use again the terminology of this problematic dichotomy.

My colleague is working hard in writing a philosophical book. He postpones the satisfaction of many of his desires in doing this. When asked he says that the reason for this is that he wants to write a good philosophical book. But further questions might reveal that he feels an obligation to aim at *t*, because he believes good philosophy to be intrinsically valuable or holds that it belongs to his professional duties to aim at *t*, etc. Is this reason extra-moral because it is based on a subjective preference? Or is it a moral one because it is based on normative beliefs regarding the intrinsic value of good philosophy or professional duties? It is hard to conceive some life-world reason which is totally independent from any normative belief, a belief about what one is obliged or permitted to do, what is valuable etc. If a person refuses to reveal more than her subjective preferences in giving a reason for her *f*-ing this amounts to saying: "I have a subjective preference for *a* and I think this is - under the given circumstances - a good reason to *f*". She might be wrong about this. There might be interests of other persons involved, which she does not realize or which she realizes but does not want to respect. In any case she would *understand* the objection: "But there are other persons involved, you should respect their interests" - even if she indicated her understanding of this objection in saying: "I think they are irrelevant!"

In cases in which reference to personal desires constitutes a good reason for action, this is so because there are no competing reasons like those which are implied by individual rights of other persons which would be violated if I acted to satisfy my desires. One might even adopt a principle of the following kind: Whenever other considerations of practical reason are irrelevant in some concrete situation act such that you satisfy your present desires. A principle like this one would assure that personal desires under specific circumstances constitute good objective reasons for action based on a general normative principle.

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Obviously, however, there are many other types of good prima facie reasons. For example those based on duties and virtues which are connected with some social role which has become part of my life. Sometimes these roles are freely chosen, sometimes they are a result of my upbringing or my birth or some external event and it is not always clear how to draw the lines. These specific duties and virtues constitute good reasons to act not for everybody, but only for those whose life is characterized by these roles.

There are good prima facie reasons based on some prior commitment, a promise or a contract for example. These, too, are reasons dependent on something personal. They are not reasons for those who did not promise or entered no contract.

There are good prima facie reasons based on (life-world-)moral principles - deontological ones like not to treat anybody as a mere instrument for optimizing one's own preferences, and teleological ones like to foster common well-being.

And finally, there are good prima facie reasons based on the agent's personal interests. These reasons sometimes require to satisfy our present desires and sometimes tell not to satisfy them. Some of these personal interests are determined by one's desires (present and future), some are dependent on general personal commitments and projects which cannot be reduced to personal desires (present or future). Here, too, it is difficult to draw the lines.

Life-world reasons are not open to far-reaching rationalizations. In most cases, it sounds strange to ask further questions, if the immediate reason was already mentioned. The question "Why did you come to the museum?" is sufficiently answered by "Because I promised to do so". Further questioning would be an indication that the questioner doesn't accept the promise as a good reason to come or that he presupposes some relevant counter-reason which has not been mentioned. Theorizing about well-established (life world-)reasons makes rarely sense if it aims at delegitimization. In most cases well-established reasons are stronger than theories of practical rationality. Theorizing about practical reasons makes sense only if it is directed towards systematization, towards securing a higher level of practical coherence.

5. Reconstructive Coherentism Regarding Reasons

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A says: "It's 4.30 p.m.". You ask A why he said it (*f*) and A answers: "Because B asked me to tell the time" (*r*). There could have been other reasons, like A knew that B had a date at 5 p.m. It seems again that *r* is a good reason for *f*.

An act should be taken to be rational iff there are good overall reasons in its favour. The theory of practical rationality is a theory of good reasons. I am convinced that this is the only viable account of practical rationality, but it is not the only one existing, it is not even the dominant one. In analytic philosophy and beyond 'rationality' is still mostly conceived consequentialistically (v. Wright called it intentionalist, some call it the "rational choice approach"). For a consequentialist theory of rationality there is no immediate and direct way to render *f* rational given *r*. A consequentialist needs to find some further subjective aim (in case of hedonist consequentialism a desire) in order to render *f* rational given *r*. In many cases, indeed, there might be such subjective aims of A - self-oriented ones such as getting into trouble (for A), other-regarding ones such as satisfying some of B's desires - aims which can be realized in A's *f*-ing. But further subjective aims of these or other kinds are not at all necessary to render *f* rational. Under normal circumstances to be asked for the time is a good reason to tell the time.

This *prima facie* reason might be reducible to a more fundamental one like not to frustrate other persons' explicit wishes. Such a more fundamental reason would imply a large set of more specific reasons, among these also *r*. But even this more fundamental reason could not help to save the consequentialist account of rationality. Theorizing about rationality aims at reduction. Like any other theory the theory of rationality tries to draw inferences from one type of reason to another, hoping to end up with some few fundamental kinds. But notwithstanding the legitimacy of this device, it makes not much sense to postulate some singular type of practical reason as *the* criterion of rationality, not knowing whether it is possible to develop an adequate theory of rationality on this basis. A theory of practical rationality is adequate iff all (or at least sufficiently many) actions which have good reasons in their favour meet at least one of the criteria of this theory (proof of completeness) and no action meeting at least one of the criteria of the theory is against good reasons (proof of correctness). Since in many cases we do not know for sure whether some concrete action is indeed reasonable (= has indeed good overall reasons in its favour), theorizing about practical rationality helps to answer the question whether some concrete action is reasonable. The proof of a theory of practical rationality has to be confined to core cases of practical reasoning. Core cases of practical reasoning

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are those which can be decided without the help of a normative theory - or less challenging - without the help of the theory in question.

In order to see the far-reaching consequences of a coherentist approach to the theory of rationality, it is helpful to take a look at v. Wrights later thought. Revising his former 'intentionalist', i. e. consequentialist analysis¹⁰, he included reasons for action which cannot be understood such that there is a subjective aim or intention *t* and there are relevant beliefs *b* such that doing *a* is a good means to realize *t*. v. Wright argues - rightly I think - that many actions done with good reason do not fit into this consequentialist scheme. In many cases of agency there are no motivating intentions which aim at realizing some state, and which render some action a good means for achieving this aim. There are actions which are an adequate response to some 'external' social event (like telling the time when asked). v. Wright even acknowledges that actions of this kind, which have no 'intentionalist reasons in their favour, can still be reasonable, in the sense that we can understand them as adequate responses, but v. Wright rejects to call them "rational". The reason for this astonishing move is that v. Wright confines practical rationality *ad hoc* to consequentialist reasons, but this is at odds not only with the coherentist approach to the theory of practical rationality but also with the ordinary use of terms. If we followed v. Wright, the theory of practical rationality would fall into pieces: Rule-following actions of different provenience would require reasons, but they were out of the domain of rationality and thus we would lose any theoretical basis to judge, where goal-directed consequentialist action is adequate and where other reasons for action should be included.

Coherentism takes the plurality of good objective reasons as the starting point for the theory of rationality. It has no bias in favour of some privileged type of normative reasons. A coherentist reconstruction of good reasons embraces many different types of life-world reasons as potential good objective reasons.

6. The Compatibility of Agent-Relativity and Reason Objectivism

Practical rationality is the result of practical reasoning. Practical reasoning means weighing (objective) reasons. Thus practical reasoning aims at coherence of reasons

¹⁰ Cf. *Explanation and Understanding* (1971), Ithaca/N.J.; *Das menschliche Handeln im Lichte seiner Ursachen und Gründe*, in Hans Lenk (ed.) (1979), *Handlungstheorien - interdisziplinär*, vol. 2, 417-430, München, and (1994) *Normen, Werte und Handlungen*, chap. III, Frankfurt am Main.

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(at practical coherence¹¹). Practical coherence requires to distance yourself from your present desires and finally from your personal point of view in general. Therefore reason objectivism seems to require an impersonal point of view, a view from nowhere¹². Agent-relativity and reason-objectivism seem to be at odds. Since reasons are something intimately connected with one's personal life, reason-objectivism, seems to be inadequate. Possibly it is the suggestive force of this argument which is the most reliable ally of reason subjectivism.

This argument, however, is forceful only within a general consequentialist frame. If rational action is taken to be a means for optimizing its consequences, an evaluative measure is required. This measure attributes values to specific states of affairs (those being possible consequences of the respective action). The rational consequentialist agent thus looks to the future history of the world, picks out the relevant aspects and evaluates. If the evaluation of states of the world is fundamental and (rational) choice is derivative, all good reasons for action ought to be contained in the agent's evaluation. But a state of the world doesn't show any personal traits, it has no special relation to the agent. Agent-relativity in valuing states of the world seems to be incompatible with an objective point of view. This explains why utilitarianism maintains the extremely implausible moral requirement that all agents should optimize the same overall value function. Things look fundamentally different from a non-consequentialist point of view. From a Kantian perspective, objective (i. e. moral) reasons require certain constraints for personal maxims, constraints which are constituted by the universalizability test or by the compatibility with a social world of autonomous agents. The Kantian perspective focuses on actions, not on states, and this allows for a combination of objective (moral) reasons and (subjective) agent-relativity. The stoicist perspective, I have in mind, allows for objective agent-relative reasons, reasons which are bound to the person, her projects and commitments, her history and scopes, and which nonetheless can be intersubjectively accepted und understood .

Agent-relative reasons can be communicated and accepted only if there is a common conceptual frame for understanding and justifying subjective claims. Part of this common frame is normatively constituted, i. e. possible because there is an overlapping normative consensus based on certain normative principles (of toleration, of beneficence, of individual liberty etc.). This normative consensus will

¹¹ I say a bit more about practical coherence in a recent paper "Praktische Kohärenz", *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, vol. 51 (1997), 175-192.

¹² Cf. Nagel, Th. (1986), *The View from Nowhere*, Oxford.

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not suffice, however, at least it will not suffice in a modern society with its anonymity of interactions and its plurality of forms of life, values and cultural settings. The necessary stability of social interaction requires furthermore what one might call institutional reasons. Reasons which reduce the broad spectrum of actions compatible with commonly accepted normative principles. These institutional reasons are to a large extent independent from personal conditions. Barbara took it for granted that the mere fact of having promised to come under normal circumstances is a good reason for me to come. In order to develop this expectation it is not necessary for her to speculate about my personal life, my projects, my motivational set and my moral principles.

If we did not assume that we act on the basis of good objective reasons, among them also institutional reasons, we would have to suspect either that our motivational setup is incredibly similar or that we all acquired firm dispositions to follow specific rules of interaction (which would push rule-conforming behavior beyond the scope of practical rationality and free choice). Both of these assumptions are less convincing than the assumption that we share some insight in good objective reasons in general and institutional reasons specifically, and that we act according to these reasons in sufficiently many cases.

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