Abstract

Queerness and the Commitment of Reasons

Here are two of the most fundamental normative questions: 1) what do we have reason to do? and 2) what do we have reason to believe? Within these inquiries moral reasons might appear to stick out as especially metaphysically queer, as Mackie and other error theorists have argued. By contrast, instrumental reasons to pursue one’s ends, or epistemic reasons to form true beliefs, look more respectable. I argue to the contrary. Reasons of any sort have a similar kind of normativity – they all stake claims about considerations that favor one’s actions or attitudes. And it is favoring relations, not the various considerations that are said to favor, which raise queerness concerns. Thus, if moral reasons are metaphysically queer, all reasons are metaphysically queer, including without exception reasons to advance one’s ends and to believe in the entities, properties, and relations posited by our best science. When it comes to queerness objections, all reason-implicating normativity, wherever it is found, stands or falls together.
We are always deciding what to do. In our more reflective moods we might consider what we have reason to do. And if we are philosophically reflective we might even wonder what reasons there are, or what we are really thinking and talking about when we think and talk about reasons and what we ought to do.

Just as few would deny that there are reasons for belief, few would deny that there are reasons for action. Many philosophers, for instance, hold that we have basic reasons to advance our contingent ends, and derived reasons to do those things that are instrumental to or constitutive of advancing our ends. Some Humeans go further to say that this is the whole story concerning practical reasons, and deny that there are basic, non-derivative reasons to be moral. At most we have reasons to be moral insofar as doing so advances our contingent ends. Of course, there is the opposing view that there are basic reasons to engage in characteristically moral behaviors, like being honest, helping others, and refraining from harming others, that do not derive from contingent ends and interests. Proponents of this view can claim that we should adopt the interests of others as one of our ends, which flips the Humean dependency: instead of deriving reasons from our ends, we derive reasons to pursue some ends from basic reasons to be moral. How are we to settle these substantive disputes about what basic reasons there are?

It would be great if we could knock out an entire class of reasons on metaphysical grounds. This is the strategy of arguments from metaphysical queerness, which purport to leave only a limited class of reasons standing after we see the bizarre metaphysics that some reasons...

* Acknowledgments
bring in train. Philippa Foot 1972¹ and John Mackie proposed the argument and deployed it against morality, and Richard Joyce has recently developed and defended the most cogent version of the argument to date.

Basic moral reasons might seem like an easy target for arguments from queerness, for they purport to reach out and “magically” apply to individuals regardless of whether or not they care about moral considerations. It is hard to imagine what kind of metaphysics could underwrite such an objectively binding normative force, and how natural beings like ourselves could develop a faculty for detecting it. By contrast, the basic end-given reasons that Humeans advocate only require that beings like us have ends, and so actually care about something or another. Because caring is no more than a psychological state, basic end-given reasons carry an allure of metaphysical respectability.

Let me assume, then, that at least some reason claims are cognitive so that some reasons can be realistically construed, and look at the metaphysical issues that arise. I will argue that, despite the wide appeal of the metaphysical innocence of end-given reasons, the argument from queerness is not so precise as to excise moral reasons from the world, leaving other kinds of reasons intact. My simple goal is to vindicate the following conditional claim: if moral reasons are metaphysically queer, all reasons are metaphysically queer (including without exception reasons to advance one’s ends and to believe in the entities, properties, and relations posited by our best science). When it comes to queerness objections, all reason-implicating normativity, wherever it is found, stands or falls together.

¹ In this piece I refer to the views expressed in Foot’s 1972 paper “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives.” She has since changed her views and I do not take issue with any of her more recent positions.
Before I embark, let me acknowledge that I will say little about what (the putatively naturalizable) end-give reasons are. By calling them “contingent” and referencing psychological states like caring, I have suggested that end-given reasons are reasons to satisfy whatever desires or preferences we might have, where desires can be self-regarding, other regarding, or what have you. On other conceptions, there are ends that we necessarily have just in virtue of being the kinds of creatures that we are, and so we would have reason to pursue those necessary ends. Williams has also introduced the idea that reasons flow not just from desires or preferences, but commitments to principles, and other elements of our “subjective motivational set.” These internal reasons are to be contrasted with external reasons that flow from considerations that are external to our subjective motivational set, basic moral reasons being among them.

Let me be clear that I am not here defending instrumentalism, internalism, externalism, or any first order view about what reasons there are. I am making a meta-normative point. I want to step back from all of these theories about where reasons come from, and argue that all these theories share the same core semantic commitment, so that if this commitment engenders metaphysical queerness concerns it does so for all reason claims. As a result, it is not crucial what conception of end-given reasons we adopt. Having said that, I will pick on reasons to pursue our contingent desires or preferences, for their metaphysical naturalizability is often taken for granted. When I use the term “end-given reason” I am referring to these reasons, and when I talk about Humeans I am referring to those who defend only these kinds of reasons. I also pick on basic, external, moral reasons for action because their metaphysical queerness is often taken for granted. But in the end I want to show that all reasons, wherever they are found, would introduce exactly the same kind of queerness. Instrumental reasons, internal reasons, external
reasons, and, as I argue later, epistemic reasons – none of them would be any queerer than another.

I. The Queerness Objection

The argument from queerness is not always couched at the level of reasons. Often it is moral value that is at stake, or the moral ought. To make my case I need to connect these other complaints to queerness arguments grounded in reasons.

J. L. Mackie was the first to use the term “metaphysical queerness,” so let me start with him. When one reads through the first chapter of *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* one gets the impression that the argument from queerness casts a very wide net. In the first instance Mackie complains about objective values: “If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe.”\(^2\) As the argument proceeds, however, he not only calls into question objective values, but also objective requirements, objective validity, ethical authority, external authority, the categorical quality of moral requirements, objective, intrinsic prescriptivity, (or sometimes just objective prescriptivity) and authoritative prescriptivity.

The best indication we get from Mackie is that his complaint was more narrowly focused than this grab-bag would suggest. His primary target appears to be the normativity of categorical imperatives, as is evident in this passage:

Now Kant himself held that moral judgments are categorical imperatives, or perhaps are all applications of one categorical imperative, and it can plausibly be maintained at least that many moral judgments contain a categorically imperative element. So far as ethics is concerned, my thesis that there are no objective

\(^2\) Mackie 1977, 38.
values is specifically the denial that any such categorically imperative element is objectively valid. The objective values which I am denying would be action-directing absolutely, not contingently (in the way indicated) upon the agent’s desires and inclinations.³

For Kant, the term ‘categorical imperative’ refers to at least two different things. Narrowly, the term refers to the particular injunction to always act on those maxims that you can will to be a universal law. In a wider sense, the sense Mackie is concerned with, a categorical imperative is a true ought claim that is not grounded in one’s contingent ends. Hypothetical imperatives, by contrast, are ought claims grounded in one’s contingent ends. They are often expressed as conditional ought claims where the antecedent includes reference to desire or preference satisfaction, or more generally to an end-setting attitude. ‘If you want to get a philosophy degree and if logic is required to do so, then you ought to take a logic course’ would be an example of a hypothetical imperative in conditional form.⁴

³ Mackie 1977, 29.
⁴ As Mackie noted (1977, 28), one can construct categorical imperatives that are conditional in their logical form. For example, ‘if you are in the position to render aid to someone in need with little inconvenience to yourself, then you ought to do so’ is a categorical imperative that applies under certain conditions identified in the antecedent. The key to distinguishing categorical imperatives from hypothetical ones is not their conditional form, but whether the imperative only applies to agents insofar as they engage agents’ contingent ends.

Sometimes one and the same condition can give rise to both hypothetical and categorical imperatives. Contrast the statements ‘if you want to dominate others, you should become a prison guard,’ and ‘if you want to dominate others, you should not become a prison guard.’ The first statement asserts a hypothetical imperative because one’s ends ground the ought claim. The second statement asserts a categorical imperative, where the likelihood of unjust domination grounds this ought claim. Your preference for domination provides evidence that the inmates will suffer unjustly at your hand, and you ought not do such things, so that is why you ought not become a prison guard. If we need a lexical distinction to differentiate the hypothetical from the categorical, I find the construction ‘Given that . . . ’ to be useful. (I thank ___ for this helpful lexical usage.) So to assert a hypothetical imperative one can say ‘Given that you want to dominate others, you should become a prison guard.’ The important point is that ends ground hypothetical oughts, and considerations other than ends ground categorical oughts.
I take it that Mackie is right to suppose that ethics is rife with categorical requirements. Consider one: you ought not harm others, *ceteris paribus*, even if you don’t care about being moral and even if harming others would actually advance your ends. This kind of requirement presents the kind of objectively binding ought that Mackie finds so strange. If observing this requirement advances none of my ends, what in the world is this supposed fact that I ought not harm others? It looks like a queer fact.

As I see the issue, Mackie’s indictment against categorical requirements, or oughts, is an indictment against non-end-given reasons in general. Ought judgments are overall or all-things-considered judgments about what one should do, and if there is something one should to do all-things-considered it is because there are reasons for performing that action that “win out” among all other competing reasons. In short, oughts are constructed out of reasons. And reasons, as I understand them, are conceptually and explanatorily primitive normative units. Exactly how reasons compete and combine with one another is a complex matter and it is unlikely that all of them can be additively aggregated, utilitarianism notwithstanding. But more to the point, there is nothing in addition to the reasons we have that generates overall oughts, and so the concern

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5 Take the case that I ought to visit my grandmother in the hospital. It its true that I ought to visit my grandmother in the hospital just in case there are reasons in favor of doing that, and those reasons are not outweighed or neutralized by considerations that count in favor of incompatible courses of action. In case I have sufficient and equally strong reason to do any one of a number of incompatible actions in the set of available actions S, one can say that I ought to do any one of the actions in S, and I ought not do any action outside of S. Each action in S would be permissible.

6 My reason to visit my grandmother in the hospital might “win out” amongst all the reasons I have for doing various incompatible things, but it is unlikely that all the competing reasons are additively balanced in a normative scale. Arguments to the effect that obligations and duties are special kinds of reasons that interact with other reasons in non-additive ways are particularly persuasive. See Raz 1986, Chapter 2. Unfortunately, this is not the place to further articulate the structure of reasons space, including the differential roles of *prima facie*, *pro tanto*, sufficient, conclusive, agent relative, agent neutral, action, outcome, internal, and external reasons. Luckily, the metaphysical issues will not turn on these subtleties.
about categorical imperatives can be relocated to the level of basic non-end-given reasons without loosing any of its force.

Mackie is not alone in advancing the queerness objection against categorical imperatives. Foot 1972 discusses categorical oughts and explicitly questions whether any of them implicate reasons. She does so by drawing a powerful analogy between the injunctions of ethics and the injunctions of etiquette or club rules. A given rule of etiquette might say that I should do X and that I should not do Y, and in saying so it is insensitive to my particular, contingent ends. But clearly, I do not have a basic reason to obey the rules of etiquette despite the fact that its injunctions address all individuals categorically. Ethicists might speak as though ethics is different from etiquette, for individuals do have basic reasons to be moral. Foot 1972 finds such claims puzzling. It is this putative difference between etiquette and morality—the “fugitive thought”—that needs explaining: “[I]t is supposed that moral considerations necessarily give reasons for acting to any man. The difficulty is, of course, to defend this proposition, which is more often repeated than explained. Unless it is said, implausibly, that all ‘should’ or ‘ought’ statements give reasons for acting, which leaves the old problem of assigning a special categorical status to moral judgment, we must be told what it is that makes the moral ‘should’ relevantly different from the ‘shoulds’ appearing in normative statements of other kinds.”

Foot 1972 thinks there are two ways for a norm to be categorical. One way is for its content to be categorical, as when the imperative applies regardless of one’s contingent ends, and another way is for its categorical content to be normatively binding. I prefer to reserve the term ‘categorical’ for the first use, and simply call all binding force normative force. To presume that the normative force of categorical norms is different in kind than the normative force of hypothetical imperatives begs all the important questions.

Foot 1972, 161.
Richard Joyce agrees with both Mackie and Foot 1972 that categorical imperatives would be metaphysically bizarre and he is quite clear that the problem lies in the idea of an non-derivative reason to be moral. Here is how he compares his position to Kant and Foot 1972:

Foot interprets Kant as holding that moral imperatives do not merely “apply” to persons regardless of their desires or interests, but imply that persons have *reasons* to act regardless of their desires or interests – and in this way they (putatively) *bind* persons, in a way that etiquette does not bind us. But she does not think that such reason-bringing imperatives are philosophically defensible, and so she accuses Kant of attempting to imbue morality with a “magical force.” The failure of strong categorical imperatives, however, does not lead Foot in the direction of a moral error theory, since she thinks belief in their validity is a mistake that only Kant and like thinkers have made – ordinary users of moral concepts do not generally make this blunder. My contention is that Foot is correct about the “magical force” of strong categorical imperatives, but wrong in thinking that they are expendable to morality, and this pattern of agreeing with one part of Foot’s project, and disagreeing with another, is something I share with Mackie.

Joyce 2001, 37 (emphasis his).

Though these thinkers are suspicious of basic reasons to be moral, it is striking that none of them are normative skeptics. They think that their objection will apply to the targeted domain of basic, non-end-given reasons and categorical imperatives, leaving other kinds of reasons intact. As a result, Joyce and Foot 1972 have no qualms embracing versions of instrumentalism, whereby reasons ultimately stem from contingent ends and interests, and Mackie explicitly states that hypothetical imperatives are perfectly natural: “On a naturalist analysis, moral judgments
can be practical, but their practicality is wholly relative to desires or possible satisfactions of the person or persons whose actions are to be guided . . . .”

II. The Metaphysics of Queerness

Before we assess the queerness objection we must clarify it. There are several ways that one could understand the objection. I want to address three of them. Only the third will really engage the project of metaphysical queerness.

First, there might be a conceptually based criterion for reasons that non-end-given reasons, and particularly basic moral reasons, do not meet. It is often thought, for instance, that normative reasons must be capable of motivating individuals, or explaining their action, or convincing them to act, or otherwise engaging them. If there is a conceptually grounded motivational criterion for reasons, then basic moral reasons might be ruled out with an argument along the following lines:

1. As a conceptual matter, genuine, binding reasons must be capable of motivating agents.\(^1\)

2. Non-end-given reasons, including moral reasons, purport to apply to individuals regardless of their ability to motivate them.

3. Therefore, so-called non-end-giving reasons do not fall under the concept of a genuine, binding reason.

\(^9\) Mackie 1977, 33.

\(^10\) This represents a reasons internalist thesis, not a motivational internalism thesis. There is a huge literature on reasons internalism, and this is not a paper on that subject. I mean to refer to all the various conceptually grounded theses according to which one conceptually analyzes reasons in terms of some motivational property. The most popular view comes from Williams 1981, where, roughly, one has reason to φ only if one’s fully rational self would be motivated to φ.
I think this argument incorrectly builds in to the concept of a normative reason a motivational requirement. To show that there is such a requirement we would have to show that those moralists who claim that one has reason, say, not to harm others regardless of whether it serves his motivational set, is conceptually confused. That is a tall order. Moralists do not appear to be conceptually confused; they know perfectly well what a reason would be, they just disagree with various others about what reasons there are. Ergo, the motivational requirement is not conceptually grounded.

More importantly, this is not an objection from metaphysical queerness. To see why, consider a similar objection against putative unicorns with no horns. As a conceptual matter, unicorns are horse-like creatures that normally have a single horn growing out of their head. For those familiar with unicorn lore, you already know that the horn can be ground up into a powder with magical properties. Under this concept of a unicorn any creature that does not normally have that horn is not really a unicorn. That is not to say that so-called hornless unicorns would be metaphysically queer. As a matter of fact, “unicorns” that do not normally have horns are not metaphysically queer. They are horses. Similarly, to say that putative reasons that do not meet the motivational criterion are ruled out on conceptual grounds is not to say that such things would be metaphysically queer. Because I have considered the conceptual issues elsewhere, and because I want to consider metaphysical concerns, let me just table conceptually grounded objections to moral reasons.

As a second attempt to capture metaphysical queerness, one could argue that non-end-given reasons, including basic moral reasons, do not exist as a matter of fact. Outside of ethics, people often deny the existence of Bigfoot, the Abominable Snowman (or Yeti), and the Loch Ness monster. However, while this is a metaphysical claim of sorts, it does not register the
queerness that is supposed to motivate arguments from metaphysical queerness. The thought behind queerness must be that basic ethical reasons would not be comprised of the same kinds of entities, properties and relations we already recognize. Basic ethical reasons would require us to (unnecessarily) expand our ontology. Thus, the argument against the existence of creatures like Big Foot is not a good analogy. Big Foot, if he were to exist, would be metaphysically naturalizable, and his discovery would not call for an expansion of the kinds of entities, properties or relations that we have come to recognize in the world. His kind would be more of the same, for presumably it would be a flesh and blood creature with a biological history, at base composed by the entities recognized by our best physics.

There must be a third way to interpret the queerness objection. It is not merely that non-end-given reasons, including basic moral reasons, do not exist as a matter of fact, but that their existence would require entities, properties, or relations of “a very strange sort,” as Mackie would say, “utterly different than anything in the universe.” As we have seen, this is not so with Bigfoot, the Abominable Snowman (or Yeti), and the Loch Ness monster, but it does seem to apply in the case of witches. If there were witches we would have to expand our basic ontology to include magical, spell-casting powers, and the supernatural ability to repel water. They would not be more of the same; they would not be mere biological creatures composed from physical stuff.

The queerness objection to non-end-given reasons is more like objections to witches than objections to unicorns or Big Foot. This much seems to capture the heart and soul of objections against non-end-given reasons: if we recognized such reasons we would not be recognizing more of the same kinds of things that we already recognize. We would have to recognize something that guides action “absolutely” or that is “objectively prescriptive,” thus expanding our ontology.
to include the bizarre. If we can do without non-instrumental reasons, better to stick with a simpler, more intelligible ontology.

End-given reasons are thought to evade this concern. All they ask of the world is that beings care about something or another, that they have desires and preferences. If they do not, then there are no practical reasons. Because we already recognize caring as a part of psychology, end-given reasons introduce no new ontology. They are more of the same.

III. Wherein Lies the Queerness

Now we must assess the queerness concern. My method is to look at putatively basic moral reasons to see how they might introduce queer ontologies, and then look at other kinds of reasons, including end-given reasons, to see if they can do without the suspect metaphysics.

A. An Example of a Basic Moral Reason and the Semantic Structure of Reasons

Suppose you are about to enter a subway car that has standing room only. In your efforts to find a spot, you settle on a space where you happen to be standing on a woman’s foot, causing her significant pain. The moralist says that you have a basic reason not to cause others pain, and so you have reason to step off the woman’s foot. Now, you probably already care about the interests of others, and so you might have an end-given reason to step off the woman’s foot. Our question, however, is whether the moralist is citing a particularly queer kind of reason to step off of this woman’s foot, one that is not grounded in your contingent ends.

What could it be about this basic reason not to cause pain that is particularly metaophysically troubling? Let us look at the components of the reason. On the one hand there is the fact that you are causing the woman pain. That seems to be as metaophysically respectable as you causing yourself pain. Nothing particularly queer there so long as we countenance the phenomenological aspect of feeling pain in our ontology, one way or another. On the other
hand, there is the fact that you are standing on her foot. Here, again, standing on someone’s foot is not metaphysically troubling in the least. How about the causal relation between your stepping on her foot and the pain produced. That does not look metaphysically troubling either. Neither is your alternative – to step off the woman’s foot, thereby relieving her pain.

The putative moral reason in this case is supposed to be something more than these facts. It is supposed to relate these facts in a particularly normative way: the fact that your present action is causing the woman pain is a reason to cease and desist that action. And the fact that some alternative action would alleviate that pain is supposed to be a reason to engage in that alternative action. In citing a reason in this case we are citing a relation that holds between certain morally relevant considerations and possible courses of action available to you.

We can say a little more about this reason relation to render the idea clearer. In my view, we can illuminate the way in which moral considerations are supposed to relate to one’s actions and attitudes by articulating the relations as favoring or disfavoring relations. In your case, the moralist who cites a moral reason essentially claims that the causing of gratuitous pain really does count against, or disfavor, your performance of that action. And an aspect of the alternative action—that stepping off of her foot would relieve the gratuitous pain—is favoring your performance of that action. The moralist also claims that these favoring and disfavoring relations hold independently of your contingent ends, so even if relieving her pain in no way engages your ends there is still a reason for you to step off her foot (i.e., a consideration favoring your stepping off of her foot).

Symbolically, we can represent reasons as four-place predicates with the following form:

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11 See Raz 1975, 186; Scanlon 1998, 17. Dancy (2004, 15 and 2006, 39) speaks of contributory reasons as “a feature whose presence makes something of a case for acting” and this seems to be the favoring idea that I would like to consider.
R(F, A, φ, C),
which we read “F counts in favor of (or disfavors) A’s φing in circumstances C.” And now we might be able to pinpoint some aspect of basic moral reasons that is metaphysically queer. It is not the consideration that putatively does the favoring or disfavoring, expressed by F (in our example the causing of gratuitous pain), which is sometimes called a reason when “reason” is used as a unary predicate. Nor is it the action that is favored or disfavored, expressed by φ (in your case stepping on or off of one’s foot). And the circumstances, C, which might in our case include A’s ability to step off the woman’s foot, are metaphysically respectable. The only thing left to raise any metaphysical doubts is the favoring or disfavoring relation itself. So here is an admittedly excellent question: exactly what in the world are the normative relations of favoring and disfavoring?

B. Favoring Relations and End-Given Reasons

But what I find truly puzzling, and point I want to focus on, is that the end-given reasons that Mackie, Foot 1972, Joyce, and many Humeans prefer also appeal to favoring and disfavoring relations, and these philosophers have failed to recognize that end-given and non-end-given reasons are on a level, metaphysically speaking. If the objection against “objectively binding” reasons holds, it applies with equal force to end-given reasons, for end-given reasons claim that there are favorers and disfavorers, too, they just claim that the only favoring

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12 Derek Parfit 1997, David McNaughton, and Piers Rawling 2003 talk about the irreducibility of normativity, and they explicitly discuss reasons. Yet they do not explicitly hold that normativity involves a relational property. Parfit claims that the following fact is normative: that jumping is my only way to save my life gives me a reason to jump. (124, emphasis added). McNaughton and Rawling claim that the following is a normative fact: that A would enjoy fell-walking gives A a reason to fell-walk. (31, emphasis added). From these discussions it is not clear what the “giving of reasons” amounts to, or why it is irreducible. On my analysis, reasons more explicitly involve relational properties. I think this helps us to see what is unique about reasons and how queerness might apply.
consideration, F, is that an action would advance one’s ends, and the only disfavoring consideration is that an action would frustrate one’s ends.

It helps to see how Humean types are committed to binding reasons by considering an infight between two different versions of instrumentalism. After all, not all instrumentalists are cut from the same cloth. If I can show that two instrumentalists can disagree with one another about what favors what, I can show that they, too, are committed to a putatively queer reason relation. Consider first a version of instrumentalism according to which one only has reason to satisfy one’s actual, present desires (where these desires are end-setting attitudes). Following Derek Parfit, let us call this ‘present aim’ instrumentalism. Consider second a version of instrumentalism according to which one only has reason to satisfy the desires one has during the course of his complete life. Call this ‘complete life’ instrumentalism. These two versions of instrumentalism will disagree about what an agent, Andy, should do at any given moment in time. If Andy decides to do what will maximize the satisfaction of his desires over his complete life we can imagine the present-aimer in protest: “But you should maximize your present desires instead. After all, you only have reason to satisfy your present desires.” And if Andy decides to maximize the satisfaction of his present desires we can imagine the complete-lifer in protest: “But you should maximize the fulfillment of your desires over your complete life. After all, you have as much reason to satisfy your future desires as you have to satisfy the desires you presently have.” The advocates of our two instrumentalisms are not arguing about what is required by their respective sets of norms; they can agree that according to present aim instrumentalism Andy ought to satisfy his present desires, and according to complete life instrumentalism Andy ought to satisfy his complete life desires. Nor are they arguing about what Andy thinks he has

13 See Parfit 1984, Ch. 6.
reason to do, or what Andy is in fact motivated to do, or what he would be motivated to do; they might agree that Andy thinks he has reason to satisfy only his present desires and is unalterably motivated to do so.

What our two instrumentalists are arguing about is what Andy really has reason to do and particularly what considerations actually favor various actions available to him. The complete lifer claims that Andy has reason to do things that will satisfy some future desire of his; i.e., the satisfaction of a future desire favors φing. The present-aimer denies this. What Andy is currently motivated to do, and whether or not he sides with the present-aimer or complete lifer are beside the point. These instrumental reasons are “objectively binding.”

Recall the symbolic depiction of the reason predicate: R(F, A, φ, C). The Humean views seem to enjoy the allure of metaphysical respectability because all they ask of the world is that agents care about something or another (or so it seemed), and we already recognize caring as part of our ontology. Now we can see that the allure of respectability is illusory. Caring can be thought of as one candidate expression of the predicate F. However, we cannot render the favoring relations that run from Fs to φs metaphysically respectable by rendering the F relata respectable. Generally, the candidate properties expressed by F are metaphysically kosher. In the moral realm, the property of an action <that it causes pain for fun>, or <that it alleviates pain>, are examples of candidate expressions of the F predicate and these properties are no more and no less metaphysically suspect than having a certain present or future end, or caring about

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14 This dispute over what Andy should do makes a point similar to the one Hampton makes with her curmudgeon character. Hampton 1998, 142-51. Hampton’s curmudgeon only acts on his strongest occurrent motive. Hampton argues that Humean instrumentalists must either appeal to objectively authoritative reasons to criticize the curmudgeon or stick to a purely descriptive and predicative theory of human behavior. I agree.
something. In all of our examples the favoring relation, and not the various Fs, raise metaphysical questions.\textsuperscript{15}

Can one who believes in end-given reasons evade these concerns by dropping the whole idea of favoring relations? What if we simply talk explicitly about psychology? We could then say that I would be motivated to \( \varphi \), or I would be motivated to \( \varphi \) if I knew certain facts about \( \varphi \), or I would be motivated to \( \varphi \) if my psychology looked like thus and such. It seems to me that we would then ignore a concept we are all stuck with and that we all want to retain. As far as I can tell, even the various brands of instrumentalism want to talk about reasons. They are not quietists. And to talk about normative reasons one must claim, at the very least, that certain facts about available courses of action favor or disfavor actions and attitudes. I would not deny that one can add features to the account of reasons. One can, for example, add a motivational component to his reasons. One might even claim that only considerations capable of motivating agents give rise to favoring relations. But one cannot drop the idea of favoring relations altogether. Hence queerness concerns.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} To make the same point in a different way we can imagine a Humean arguing with a Kantian about what reasons the Kantian has. The Kantian might say that he does not have any reason to act in accordance with his desires on any given occasion, but rather he has most reason to act in accordance with that maxim that he can will to be a universal law. What counts in favor of an intentional action (what plays the F role), says the Kantian, is that it respects the dignity of humanity. The Humean disagrees. According to him, the Kantian really has most reason to satisfy his desires, and the Kantian is mistaken about the reasons he has. As far as I can tell, these two parties are both appealing to “objectively binding” reasons, and they simply disagree about what considerations really are reason-providing – whether humanity itself is the action-guiding objective value, F, or whether desire satisfaction (or the object of the end-setting attitude) is the action guiding, objective value, F. Both think some favoring relation or another holds; they just disagree about which ones hold.

\textsuperscript{16} My remarks echo Moore’s open question concerns. Though we are stuck with the concept of a reason relation there is still the possibility that the relational reason predicate actually refers to things in the natural world, perhaps certain facts about psychology and motivation. On its face, reason-talk is not merely talk about psychology, but we might after \textit{a posteriori} investigation discover that it refers to bits of the natural world after all. Though there is the possibility of
IV. Replies and Answers

The frustrated Humean might think that something has gone missing in my account of reasons, and particularly in my account of moral reasons. In this section I want to address three concerns that the defender of end-given reasons might raise. First, there is the possibility that by focusing almost exclusively on moral reasons I have left out objective values, which provide a further source of queerness in ethics. Second, I have not discussed the motivational aspirations of moral reasons, which make moral reasons uniquely queer. And third, I have not appreciated an objective-subjective distinction that serves to differentiate non-end-given and end-given reasons in a way that insulates end-given reasons from queerness.

A. Objective Value

Thus far I have been talking as though naturally describable properties do the favoring and disfavoring in reason relations. When you step on a woman’s foot, for instance, it is the property of that act <causing her pain> that purports to disfavor the act. But there is another view according to which the pain caused does not directly enter in to the reason relation. Instead, the pain gives rise to another property—intrinsic badness or disvalue—and it is that evaluative property that directly enters the reason relation. In the subway case, the disvalue of the situation disfavors your continuing to step on the woman’s foot, and the value of an alternative situation favors your stepping off of her foot. Perhaps this is the best way to cash out Mackie’s concern over “objective values” as a distinct issue.

Just to be clear, this value-first view does not do away with reason relations. The favoring and disfavoring would still be there, they would simply flow from value properties to rendering the favoring relation unqueer in this fashion (but see my ___), my conditional point still stands: if the queerness objection is valid (i.e., if the favoring relation really is as queer as it seems to be), it applies to all reasons whatever.
actions instead of naturally describable properties to actions. As a result, whatever queerness resides in such relations remains for the value-first view. And in addition to that, the view introduces another metaphysical entity subject to queerness: the objective value, which is supposed to be a property separate and distinct from whatever natural properties upon which it supervenes. The Humean can now say that his view is only subject to one kind of queerness—queerness at the level of favoring—whereas the moralist is committed to two kinds of queerness—that one that attends reasons and the one that attends objective values. Dialectically, this is not the best strategy for wielding the queerness objection against moral reasons. Instead of showing that some class of reasons avoids queerness, this argument acknowledges queerness across the board and selects the view with the least amount.

Here I think the appropriate response is for the moralist to disavow objective values as properties separate and distinct from the natural properties and reason-relations. We can do all the normative work we need to do without separate value properties, for the natural properties are already suited to do the favoring and disfavoring. In the subway case, it is quite clear that causing the woman pain is the thing that disfavors stepping on her foot. If we say in addition to this that there is the separate property of badness or disvalue that also disfavors the act we appear to be double-counting. For then there are two reasons to step off her foot: 1) that it would relieve her pain and 2) that is would produce a good or value. Surely (2) is just another way of capturing what is already in (1). To avoid double counting, the value-first view must deny that one has reason not to cause another pain.

There is another view according to which the value properties supervene on the natural properties, but the favoring still flows from the natural properties, not the value properties. This would also introduced value properties as a second class of potentially queer properties, so the buck passing view is to be preferred. See Stratton-Lake and Hooker 2006 for a fuller discussion of the buck-passing view.
The better strategy is to reduce objective values to natural states of affairs and reason relations through a “buck passing” account. On this view, to call a state of affairs (intrinsically) valuable is not to predicate some sui generis property to it, but to point out that it is a consideration that plays a part in basic favoring relations. To call a state of affairs disvaluable is to point out that it plays a part in disfavoring relations. So when I say that it is bad that you are stepping on the woman’s foot, causing her pain, I am not committed to anything above and beyond 1) your causing her pain and 2) that consideration disfavoring your act.

Granted, moralists are not forced to adopt the buck-passing view, but if they do not then they must answer queerness objections at two levels. I am content to show that there is a way to embrace basic moral reasons without committing oneself to any kind of entity, property or relation that the advocate of end-given reasons can do without. Sure, this kind of moralist still needs the favoring relation, but so, too, does the advocate of end-given reasons (or epistemic reasons, as I argue later).

B. Metaphysical Motivation

Another complaint from Mackie is that moral facts would require weird motivational properties that are independent of human psychologies: “values differ from natural objects precisely in their power, when known, automatically to influence the will.” Under a strong version of the view, which he considers a variety of Platonism, objective values not only influence the will, but dispositively motivate moral action. As Mackie puts it, objective values “not merely tell men what to do but . . . ensure that they do it, overruling any contrary inclinations.” This should not be confused with the conceptually-grounded motivational

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19 Mackie 1977, 40.
20 Mackie 1977, 23.
criterion (reasons internalism) discussed earlier. Here the thought is that moral reasons do purport to meet some motivational criterion, but in doing so they introduce entities with bizarre motivational properties.

The force of this objection depends on whether moral reasons purport to motivate individuals without having any connection to their ends, and perhaps without any connection to their contingent psychology. As with the value-first objection, moralists should simply disavow the motivational purport. Mackie is trying to saddle moralists with a crazy view that they neither need nor want. To be fair to Mackie, some philosophers have talked as though realism posits mind-independent moral properties can reach out and motivate us just by being true, but few today would seriously defend the view. Motivational internalist theses really belong at the psychological level, and they should be couched in terms of whether normative judgments have motivational purport, not whether normative facts have motivational purport. Joyce is admirably clear on this point. So one who advocates basic moral reasons can say that it is not reasons themselves that motivate, but our judgments about our reasons (their truth or falsity aside). I do not here want to develop my own motivational internalist thesis. I just want to point out that no one should hold that any truly mind-independent properties necessarily have motivational efficacy. Thus, moralists are not committed to anything with magical motivational force, and moral reasons can amount to nothing more than the favoring and disfavoring relations we have discussed. While those relations might be queer, they are relations found in all reasons.

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21 Nagel 1970, 7 (“Internalism is the view that the presence of a motivation for acting morally is guaranteed by the truth of ethical propositions themselves.”); Brink 1984, 113 (where internalism is the thesis that “the recognition of moral facts itself either necessarily motivates or necessarily provides reasons for action.”); Korsgaard 1996, 81, (“Internalists believe that that when a person has a duty, say, or knows that she has, she ipso facto has a motive for doing that duty.”).

22 He says “What seems troubling is not somebody’s being unmotivated to pursue what is good, but being unmotivated to pursue what she judges to be good.” Joyce 2001, 30.
C. Objective Versus Subjective Bindingness

The still frustrated Humean might persist that I have ignored the thrust of his complaint. He says that the problem with non-end-given reasons is that they are objectively binding instead of subjectively binding, and it is the objectivity of the bindingness that generates metaphysical queerness, as Mackie said. Haven’t I ignored this key distinction? I guess I have because I think that “A has an objectively binding reason to φ” is just another way to say “A has reason to φ” with a gratuitous epithet added on.

Let me build an example of a reason with as much subjectivity as I can to show that “objective bindingness” still holds for such a reason. Say that I have a headache and one of my ends is to alleviate my pain, and I do not have a similar end to alleviate anyone else’s pain, including yours. Not only is this my end, but it is formed by my end-setting attitudes and the reason providing consideration picked out—the pain—is in my head. While others might claim that your headache is a putative reason for me to give you two aspirin (let us suppose), I say that alleviating your pain is not my end, is not the content of my end setting attitudes, and does not pick out a consideration internal to me. So I have a reason to take two aspirin, but I do not have a reason to give you two aspirin because such a reason would be objectively binding and therefore metaphysically queer.

I might have thus picked out several perfectly good objective-subjective distinctions—my ends versus yours, my attitudes rather than yours, reason providing considerations internal to me rather than you—but they do not differentiate the nature of the favoring relation found in reasons. All they do is distinguish various considerations from which favoring relations can flow. In all these cases, the favoring or disfavoring relation would be of the same normative kind. And I do not know what it would mean to say that some of these considerations favor
objectively versus favor subjectively. They either favor or they do not, and if they favor, then we have a candidate for the queerness objection.

Here I think the analogy with witches is very helpful. Witches would be metaphysically queer in part because they have the power to cast spells. This queerness objection does not discriminate between the kinds of spells witches can cast – it is spell casting generally that is queer. Suppose that someone claims that certain witches are not metaphysically queer, viz., witches who can cast spells on themselves only. These witches are “subjectively magical,” the claim goes, and so the queerness objection does not apply to them.

The appropriate reply is to remind this person that the queerness resides in spell casting quite generally. It does not matter what the spells affect. I think we can say the same thing to those who claim that favoring relations only flow from ends. The queerness objection applies to the favoring relations quite generally, and it does not matter wherefrom the favoring flows. If you recognize one kind of witch, objections to other witches cannot be based on metaphysical queerness; if you recognize one kind of reason, objections to other kinds of reasons cannot be based on metaphysical queerness.

Lastly, there is a sense in which moral reasons claim to be *intrinsically* reason-giving, and Humeans might take this to introduce unique metaphysical problems. In particular, the reason relations that hold in morality would appear to be brute and unexplainable. Unfortunately, the way in which moral reasons purport to be intrinsically reason-giving is poorly understood. While moral reasons might not be contingent on one’s ends, they might nevertheless be contingent on circumstance that must hold for the favoring relation to obtain. We have symbolized these circumstances with the predicate C and they might include available
alternatives and genuine agency. A non-agent, like a sea gull, for instance, would not be normatively bound, and so there would not be any considerations that either normatively favor or disfavor its behaviors. Even understanding this kind of contingency, Humeans might find something inexplicable in the presence of favoring relations that do not flow from ends.

Yet anyone who believes in reasons of any sort will have trouble explaining why the favoring relations flow from the particular favorers that they in fact flow from. If favoring comes from ends—if ends are intrinsically reason giving—what explains the fact that ends give rise to reasons? This, too, would look like a brute fact about the relationship between ends and actions.

So far nothing serves to distinguish different kinds of reasons in such a way that some of them are metaphysically respectable and the others are not. If “objectively binding” reasons are metaphysically queer, one does not escape the queerness by grounding the reasons in one’s ends. You cannot get rid of the favorers and disfavorers by relocating their point of origin somewhere in ends. At the overall level, you cannot get rid of the to-be-done-ness, the objective prescriptivity, merely by relocating it from categorical imperatives to hypothetical imperatives. It appears that the mysterious normativity of reasons is like the proverbial bump in the rug. You can push it around, but you can never quite get rid of it.

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23 There might be other things that have to be in the background for this reason-giving relation to hold in particular cases, but they would not be a proper part of the favoring relation. In Dancy’s terminology, they would be enablers. See Dancy 2004, 38-43.

24 As a last ditch effort, there is a brand of practical reason we might call perspectival reasons (see Shaffer-Landau 2004, 207-08), according to which what counts as a reason for you essentially depends on your perspective. On this line of thought, it is not necessarily true that individuals have reasons to take the means to their ends. What matters is what your normative-evaluative outlook counts as a reason, so you might even take the frustration of your desires as a reason to choose particular actions. Even still, this view does not escape the favoring relation characteristic of all reasons, it merely makes the favoring relation a bit elusive by constructing it out of the attitudes of particular agents. Because it is this favoring relation that is objectively binding, even this view will not evade a queerness objection.
V. Epistemic Queerness

The above discussion might tempt some to deny that there are any practical reasons, for they all seem to be metaphysically queer. Hume might have advocated such a position, while maintaining an allegiance to theoretical, or epistemic reasons. But the queerness objection cannot be honed to excise practical reasons alone. If valid, it applies with equal force to epistemic reasons.

Much of modern epistemology has not focused explicitly on reasons for belief, opting instead to analyze justification and knowledge. One could try to provide a theory of justification that makes no appeal, implicitly or explicitly, to reasons, but I suspect the best theories of justification will incorporate reasons for belief. On one attractive view, a belief is justified to the extent it accords with one’s evidence. And I would argue that evidence that p simply is a reason to believe that p. If I am right, a host of normative concepts found in epistemology are theoretically related, and reasons play a central role. This is so regardless of the particular bent one has in epistemology, whether one is foundationalist, coherentist, internalist, externalist, accessibilist, reliabilist, or what have you.

Even if I am not right that epistemic theories will integrate the notion of reasons, we are well within our rights to talk directly about reasons for belief. When we do we find that epistemic cases generally fit the schema for the reason predicate, \( R(F, A, \varphi, C) \), where \( \varphi \) is the formation of a belief, and the various Fs are evidentials, like appearances, memories, and other beliefs.

Let me rehearse three examples of epistemic reasons in action to make the point more clearly. First is the case of logical inference and deductive syllogisms. The content of one’s belief that p and the content of one’s belief that if p then q is evidence that q, and so a reason to
believe that \( q \) (so long as \( q \) is not so outrageous to make us reconsider our premises). Second, consider the evidential nature of appearances, and imagine that a wall appears redly to you. The red appearance is evidence that the wall really is red, and it follows that your being appeared to redly counts in favor of believing that the wall is red. Third are familiar cases where the contents of beliefs provide evidence for other beliefs through a process like induction, abduction, or inference to the best explanation. My belief that the universe is expanding in all directions is evidence that there was a Big Bang (at least given other background considerations that make the Big Bang hypothesis most plausible), and as a result I have a reason to believe in the Big Bang. Like the practical realm, many epistemic reasons will be defeasible and provide only a fallible guide to the truth. Yet the fundamental point remains that in all of these cases the reasons predicate has a fairly straightforward application.\(^{25}\) Epistemic reasons are not things that we can do without.

If the favoring relation is metaphysically suspect, it would be suspect in the epistemic domain as well. Remember, it is not the putative favorers or the things favored that raise metaphysical concerns. Our ontology is not so austere as to rule out beliefs, appearances, memories, and other items expressed by the \( F \) and \( \varphi \) predicates in the epistemic cases. It is the favoring relations that flow from these kosher properties that raise brows. Consequently, not

\(^{25}\) It is absolutely crucial that epistemology is not just about determining what beliefs are likely true, for there is the additional claim that the likely truth a belief is supposed to influence the beliefs we adopt, i.e., it normatively relates to the beliefs we hold. At the overall level we can say that beliefs ought to track truth to the extent that is possible. This raises an interesting parallel between epistemic reasons and non-end-given, practical reasons, for the reasons of epistemology purport to apply to individuals regardless of their contingent ends, just as practical non-end-given reasons purport to do. Even if I wanted to form entirely erroneous beliefs, for instance, I hope the rest of you would maintain that my redly appearances count in favor of my believing that red objects are around, and my belief in the expansion of the universe counts in favor of my believing in the Big Bang. By contrast, when I read a claim in a tabloid magazine I do not thereby have a reason for believing the claim, my belief-forming predilections aside.
only do we fail to cherry pick moral reasons with the queerness objection, but we cannot cherry 
pick practical reasons more generally.

VI. Putting Queerness Behind Us

I opened this discussion wondering whether there is a quick and easy way to rule out entire categories of reasons based on metaphysical queerness. As usual, the quick and easy solution is no solution at all. If valid, the queerness objection defeats realism about all reasons whatsoever, for all reason claims share the same core semantic commitment – they purport to normatively related various considerations to actions and attitudes of particular agents. If the normative favoring relations thereby express a queer relational property, so much the worse for all reasons, whether they be instrumental, internal, moral, external, epistemic or what have you. Just to reiterate, I have not advocated any class of reasons. I simply point out that queerness cannot help us settle any debates about what reasons there are.

By considering queerness we now have a clearer view of how normative arguments should proceed across the board (in theoretical and practical realms). If we find queerness compelling, perhaps irrealism holds for all reasons. Then we need to consider more carefully the semantics of reasons claims, and particularly whether some form of expressivism can save us from a massive normative error theory.

But let us not be too hasty. I have only argued for the conditional claim: if moral reasons are metaphysically queer, all reasons are metaphysically queer. There is still possibility of showing that some class of reasons are real and reducible to some already recognized aspect of our ontological world-view, or, should that project fail, we might accept some reasons as real but sui generis relational properties in the world. I am pessimistic about the first project, and I would guess that many are attracted to the second realist option.
Under the second realist option, one must determine which favoring relations exist – instrumental, internalist, externalist, moral, epistemic, what have you. Queerness will not help one decide to reject some candidate class of reasons. That would be akin to believing in witches that can cast spells on themselves, but objecting to witches who can cast spells on others on the grounds that such powers would be metaphysically queer. Instead, the way to make progress in normativity is to argue that favoring relations flow between certain relata, but not others. If one is a skeptic about practical reasons, for instance, one would have to argue that favoring relations do not flow from practical considerations to actions and attitudes. If one is only skeptical about moral reasons, one would have to argue that favoring relations to not flow from moral considerations to attitudes and actions. In the case where you step on a woman’s foot on the subway, you could not argue that favoring and disfavoring relations do not exist (that would be the queerness objection that applies to all reasons), but that causing this woman pain does not disfavor your stepping where her foot happens to be, and relieving her pain does not favor stepping off her foot. For those who do not think that ends as such give rise to basic reasons for action, one must argue that basic, non-derivative favoring relations do not flow from ends to actions. For each non-skeptical view in one of these domains, there is the positive argument that reason relations do flow between certain relata. This is not the place to propose a theory as to how to meet such argumentative burdens, but suffice it to say that we have, rightly, left queerness behind.
Works Cited


