

## **Might All Normativity Be Queer?**

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### **Abstract**

Here I discuss the conceptual structure and core semantic commitments of reason thought and discourse needed to underwrite the claim that ethical normativity is not uniquely queer. This deflates a primary source of ethical scepticism and it vindicates so-called *partner in crime* arguments. When it comes to queerness objections, all reason-implicating normative claims—including those concerning Humean reasons to pursue one's ends, and epistemic reasons to form true beliefs—stand or fall together.

## **Might All Normativity Be Queer?**

### **I. Introduction**

We do things. 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 thinking and talking about when we think and talk about reasons.

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 one has basic<sup>1</sup> reasons to advance one's contingent ends, and derived reasons to do those things that are instrumental to, or constitutive of, advancing one's ends.<sup>2</sup> Some Humeans say that this is the whole story concerning practical reasons, and they deny that there are basic, non-derivative reasons to be moral. There is the opposing view that there are basic moral reasons, such as reasons to help others, and refraining from harming others, that are not derived from contingent ends. How are we to settle these substantive disputes?

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 and inexplicable metaphysics that some reasons bring in train. Philippa Foot [1972]<sup>3</sup> and John Mackie [1977] deployed such an argument against moral normativity, and Richard Joyce [2001] has carried the torch to the present. There is something to the thought that moral normativity is mysterious. Basic moral reasons purport to reach out and 'magically' bind individuals regardless of whether such individuals care about being moral. Indeed, 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 reasons that Humeans advocate

carry an allure of metaphysical respectability because they seem to require only that beings like us have ends.

In light of these challenges, some moralists (those who believe in basic moral reasons) reach for *partners in crime*, claiming that other normative positions bear the same mysteries and explanatory burdens as morality [see, e.g., Shafer-Landau 2003: 209-11; Hampton 1998]. That reply has not been sufficiently appreciated.<sup>4</sup> Here I want to press the underlying message of partner in crime arguments. I do this by providing an account of the basic conceptual structure and a core semantic commitment of reason thought and discourse, for that account helps to secure the following important but elusive normative lesson: if moral reasons are metaphysically queer, all reasons are metaphysically queer, including without exception reasons to advance one's ends, and epistemic reasons to believe in the entities, properties, and relations posited by our best science. When it comes to queerness objections, all reason-implicating normative claims stand or fall together.<sup>5</sup>

## II. The Queerness Objection

When one reads through the first chapter of J. L. Mackie's *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.' [1977: 38]. 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.

Fortunately, Mackie's complaint was more narrowly focused than this grab bag suggests.

His primary target is the normativity of categorical imperatives:

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 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. [1977: 29].

In the wide sense of 'categorical imperative' Mackie is concerned with, a categorical imperative is a true ought claim that is not grounded in taking the means (broadly construed) to one's contingent ends, to be contrasted with hypothetical imperatives.<sup>6</sup>

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 best 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. When they are normative, ought judgments are overall or all-things-considered judgments about what one should do, and if there is something one should do all things considered it is because there are reasons for performing that action that 'win out' among all other competing reasons. And reasons, as I understand them,

are conceptually and explanatorily primitive normative units.<sup>7</sup> There is nothing in addition to the reasons we have that generates overall oughts, and there is nothing in addition to the moral reasons we have that generate moral bindingness and moral obligation (setting aside the non-reason-implicating content categoricity in note 9 below). At bottom, then, the sceptical concern about categorical imperatives is a concern about basic non-end-given reasons.<sup>8</sup>

Mackie is not alone. Foot [1972] discusses categorical oughts and explicitly questions whether any of them implicate reasons. She does so by drawing an analogy between the injunctions of ethics and the injunctions of etiquette or club rules. A given rule of etiquette might instruct me to  $\Phi$  and not to  $\Psi$ , and in saying so it is insensitive to my particular, contingent ends. But clearly, one does not have a basic reason to obey the rules of etiquette despite the fact that its injunctions address all individuals categorically. Moralists might speak as though morality is different from etiquette in its normative gravitas, but 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<sup>[9]</sup> 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.’ [1972: 309].

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 a 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.

[2001: 37].

Though these thinkers are suspicious of basic reasons to be moral, it is striking that none of them are normative sceptics. 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 practical instrumentalism, 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 . . .’ [Mackie 1977: 33].

### III. The Metaphysics of Queerness

Before we assess the queerness objection we must clarify it. I address three ways of understanding the objection. Only the third will 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. Bernard Williams endorsed this view: 'If there are reasons for action, it must be that people sometimes act for those reasons, and if they do, their reasons must figure in some correct explanation of their action.' [1981: 102].

Korsgaard agrees: 'Practical reason claims, if they are really to present us with reasons for action, must be capable of motivating rational persons.' [1996: 317].

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 the agents to whom they apply.
2. So-called non-end-given reasons, including moral reasons, purport to apply to agents without necessarily being capable of motivating such agents.
3. Therefore, so-called non-end-giving reasons do not fall under the concept of a genuine, binding reason.

I think this argument incorrectly builds a motivational requirement into the concept of a normative reason.<sup>10</sup> More important for the present issue, however, is that even if the motivational criterion is conceptually grounded, it does not generate 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 with magical horns. Under this concept of a unicorn, any creature that does not normally have a magical horn is not really a unicorn. But that is not to say that hornless unicorns would be *metaphysically* queer. In fact, ‘unicorns’ that do not normally have horns 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 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 composed 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 Bigfoot is not a good analogy. Bigfoot, 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 he would be a flesh and blood creature with a biological history, at base composed by the entities recognized by our best physics.

The third way to interpret the queerness objection is to say that non-end-given reasons, including basic moral reasons, would require entities, properties, or relations of ‘a very strange sort,’ as Mackie would say, ‘utterly different than anything else in the universe.’ Consider

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 of physical stuff.

The queerness objection to non-end-given reasons is more like objections to witches than objections to hornless unicorns or Bigfoot. This much seems to capture the metaphysical objections against non-end-given reasons: if we recognized such reasons 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-end-given reasons, better to stick with a simpler, more intelligible ontology.

#### **IV. Wherein Lies the Queerness?**

Let us 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. The Structure of Reasons**

Suppose you 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 *metaphysically* troubling? On the one hand, there is the fact that you are causing the woman

pain. Nothing particularly queer there so long as we countenance the feeling of 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 normatively relevant considerations and possible courses of action available to you.

One way to try to illuminate the way in which normatively relevant considerations are supposed to relate to one's actions and attitudes is by articulating the relation constitutive of reasons as *favouring* or *disfavouring* relations. [See Raz 1975: 186; Scanlon 1998: 17; Dancy 2004: 15 and 2006: 39]. In your case, the moralist who cites a moral reason essentially claims that the causing of gratuitous pain really does count against, or disfavour, your performance of that action. And an aspect of the alternative action—that stepping off of her foot would relieve the gratuitous pain—is favouring your performance of that action. The moralist also claims that these favouring and disfavouring 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 favouring your stepping off of her foot).

Symbolically, then, we can represent reasons as three-place predicates of the following

form:

$R(F, A, \Phi)$  in  $C$ ,

which we read ‘ $F$  counts in favour of (or disfavour)  $A$ ’s  $\Phi$ ing in circumstances  $C$ .’<sup>11</sup> This reveals the basic conceptual structure of reasons, and a core semantic commitment of reason claims – they purport to refer to relations. It also enables us to pinpoint some aspect of basic moral reasons that is potentially metaphysically queer. It is not the consideration that putatively does the favouring or disfavouring, expressed by  $F$  (in your case 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 favoured or disfavoured, expressed by  $\Phi$  (in your case stepping on or off of the woman’s foot). And the circumstances,  $C$ , which might in our case include your ability to step off the woman’s foot, are metaphysically respectable. The *only* thing left to raise any metaphysical doubts is the relation itself. So here is an admittedly excellent question: exactly what *in the world* are these normative relations, which we have glossed as favouring and disfavouring relations?

### **B. Favouring Relations and End-Given Reasons**

But what I find truly puzzling, and the point I want to focus on, is that the end-given reasons that Mackie, Foot [1972], Joyce, and many Humeans prefer also appeal to reasons and so appeal to favouring and disfavouring relations. End-given and non-end-given reason claims have the same conceptual structure, and the same basic semantic commitments, so they would seem to engender the same metaphysical purport. If the metaphysical objection against ‘objectively binding’ reasons holds, it applies with equal force to end-given reasons, for end-given reasons claim that there are favourers and disfavourers, too, they just claim, to take a representative Humean view, that the only favouring consideration,  $F$ , is that an action would

advance one's ends, and the only disfavoured consideration is that an action would frustrate one's ends.

It helps to see how Humeans are committed to binding reasons by considering an in-fight between two different versions of instrumentalism. Consider first a version of instrumentalism according to which one only has reason to satisfy one's actual, present desires. 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 fulfilment 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 reason to do, or what Andy is in fact *motivated* to do, or what he *would be motivated* to do under various circumstances.

What our two instrumentalists are arguing about is what Andy *has reason* to do and particularly what considerations actually favour various actions available to him. The complete lifer claims that Andy has reason to do things that will satisfy some future desire of his. The

present-aimer denies this. What they seem to disagree about is what Andy has reason to do in a normative and objectively binding way.<sup>12</sup>

Now we can see that the allure of metaphysical respectability for Humean reasons is illusory. Considerations concerning desire satisfaction can be thought of as one candidate expression of the predicate F. However, we cannot render the favouring relations that relate Fs, As and  $\Phi$ s metaphysically respectable by rendering an F relatum respectable. Even the moralist's candidate considerations expressed by F are metaphysically kosher. The fact that an action causes pain, or that it alleviates pain, are no more and no less metaphysically suspect than having a certain present or future end. In all of our examples, the relational nature of reasons, and not candidate relata, raise metaphysical questions.

Can one who believes in end-given reasons evade these concerns by dropping the whole idea of favouring relations? What if we simply talk explicitly about psychology? We could then say that Andy is motivated to  $\Phi$ , or he would be motivated to  $\Phi$  if he knew certain facts about  $\Phi$ ing, or he would be motivated to  $\Phi$  if his psychology were different. It seems to me that we would then ignore a concept we are all stuck with and that we all want to retain: that of a normative reason. And to talk about normative reasons one must claim, at the very least, that certain facts about available courses of action normatively relate to actions and attitudes. One can add features to the account of reasons. One can, for example, add a motivational component to his account of reasons. One might even claim that *only* considerations capable of motivating agents give rise to favouring relations, as internalists do. But these are additions to favouring.

At this point a certain kind of Humean can retain reason talk, but claim that it is still possible that the reason predicate refers to things in the natural world, and not some *sui generis* normative relation. On one such view, what it is for F to be a reason for A to  $\Phi$  is for A to have

a goal with content  $F$ , and for  $\Phi$ ing to further that goal. If we say of some particular case that Andy has a reason to pull a fire alarm, the reason being that doing so will reduce the suffering of others, the Humean can agree. But he would say that *what it is* for this to be a reason is not for any *sui generis* normative relation to hold, but rather for pulling the fire alarm to further Andy's goal of reducing suffering.<sup>13</sup> Applied to a less sympathetic case, Alice, who has the goal of revenge for a slight offence, would have reason to perform those actions that further this goal of hers.

If such a normative reduction works, however, consider what must be true of a non-Humean who *denies* that an agent  $A$  has reason to take an action  $\Phi$  that furthers one of  $A$ 's goals.<sup>14</sup> Such a person would either 1) lack the concept of a reason, in which case he would be talking past the Humean rather than arguing with him, 2) be missing some relevant information about the natural world, such as facts about how actions further goals, or reference-fixing information, or 3) be *conceptually confused* when trying to apply the reason concept to cases. Otherwise he would competently apply the concept of a reason to cases as the Humean does.

These positions cannot be sustained. The non-Humean need not lack the very concept of a reason, lack information about the natural world, or fall into conceptual confusion in order to (try to) disagree with the Humean. It seems entirely possible for someone with conceptual mastery of reasons and full information about the natural world to sincerely disagree with the Humean. If so, the Humean's naturalization gambit fails. A related line of argument has been pressed with respect to the irreducibility of the phenomenal in the philosophy of mind, and the same general argument will apply to variations on the Humean theme. It would also apply if non-Humeans tried to reduce reasons to natural facts of their own. Suppose, for instance, that Billy can also prevent much suffering by pulling a fire alarm, though doing so would serve none

of his goals. Nevertheless, the non-Humean says, the fact that he can prevent suffering is a reason for Billy to pull the alarm, and, he continues, *what it is* for this to be a reason is not for some *sui generis* normative relation to hold, but simply for Billy's pulling the fire alarm to reduce suffering. Clearly, a Humean can understand all the natural facts of this case, have and employ the concept of a reason, and not necessarily be conceptually confused when he says, nevertheless, there is no reason for Billy to pull the alarm (perhaps on the grounds that doing so would further no goal of his).

This disagreement is genuine, which requires the interlocutors to share the concept of a reason. By hypothesis, they share all information about the natural world, including any information that would help fix a natural referent (if such there be). The remaining disagreements about how these facts *normatively relate* to the actions and attitudes of agents therefore cannot be about the natural world; in particular, the disagreements cannot be about how actions further goals. Reductive theories don't do justice to reason discourse, and the conditional point still stands: if the queerness objection is valid (i.e., if the favouring relation really is as queer as it seems to be), it applies to all reasons whatever.

## **V. Related Matters**

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 certain 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 considerations do the favouring and disfavouring in reason relations. When you step on a woman's foot, for instance, it is the fact that the act causes her pain that purports to disfavour the act. But there is another view according to which facts about pain do not directly enter into the reason relation. Instead, the pain gives rise to another property—intrinsic badness or disvalue—and it is that evaluative property, or propositions or facts about it, that directly enters into the reason relation. On that view, the disvalue of the pain disfavors your continuing to step on the woman's foot, and the comparative value of an alternative situation favours your stepping off of her foot.

Notice that the value-first view does not do away with reason relations; it simply relocates them between evaluative considerations and actions rather than non-evaluative considerations and actions. 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 subject to only one kind of queerness—queerness at the level of favouring—whereas the moralist is committed to two kinds of queerness—one that attends favouring and one that attends objective values. Dialectically, this is not the best strategy, for it cedes the essential point, that all reasons are equally queer, and presents a different choice among degrees of queerness. After acknowledging queerness across the board, Humeans select the view with the least amount.

I am content to establish that all reasons share in the same mystery. But moralists can go one farther and embrace *buck passing* views, according to which there are no value properties that cannot be suitably reduced to the natural world and favouring relations. [See Scanlon 1998: 95-100]. Consider how a moralist might defend such a view. First, one can do all the normative

work one needs to do without separate value properties, for purely non-evaluative, natural considerations are already suited to do the favouring and disfavouring. In the subway case, it is quite clear that that fact that stepping on the woman's foot causes her pain is a suitable candidate for the thing that disfavors stepping on her foot. The big questions concern whether there are basic reasons to help others in need, not to harm others, what reasons there are to respect the environment and non-human animals, whether we have reason to treat those with special relationships to us with greater concern than those we have never met, etc. If we can answer these kinds of questions in terms of reasons, then ethics provides all the action guidance and prescriptivity we could hope for. Objective value properties and the like would not be missed.<sup>15</sup>

Second, there seem to be good objections to the value-first view. If we say there is a separate evaluative consideration that disfavors stepping on the woman's foot, and a separate evaluative consideration that favors stepping off of her foot, that would lead to double counting. For then there would be two reasons to step off her foot: 1) that it would relieve her pain and 2) that it would produce a good or value.<sup>16</sup> To avoid double counting, the value-first view must deny that one has reason to relieve another's pain. That sounds wrong, and moralists can reject it. Moreover, the addition of unnecessary value properties that threaten additional queerness provides some reason to reject the value-first view.

The better strategy, the moralist can argue, is to reduce objective values to natural properties and reason relations. On this buck-passing 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 particular part in favouring relations. To call a state of affairs disvaluable is to point out that it plays a particular part in disfavouring 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 disfavouring your act.

Granted, moralists are not forced to adopt the buck-passing view. And this is not the place to give it a full defence. The important point for the present project is that moralists have a viable, attractive option that saddles them with no more queerness than their Humean brethren.

### **B. Metaphysical Motivation**

Another complaint from Mackie is that moral facts would require weird motivational properties that are in some sense independent of human psychologies: ‘values differ from natural objects precisely in their power, when known, automatically to influence the will.’ [1977: 40]. 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, ‘overruling any contrary inclinations.’ [1997: 23]. This should not be confused with the conceptually grounded motivational criterion 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.

Clearly, the moralist should reject this 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.<sup>17</sup> To be fair to Mackie, some philosophers have talked as though realism posits mind-independent moral facts that can reach out and motivate us just by being true,<sup>18</sup> but I know of no one today who seriously defends the view. Thus, moralists are not committed to anything with magical motivational force, and moral reasons can amount to nothing more than the favouring and disfavouring relations we have discussed.

### C. Objective Versus Subjective Bindingness

What of the charge that non-end-given reasons are *objectively* binding, rather than *subjectively* binding, where it is the objectivity of the bindingness that generates metaphysical queerness? This, of course, depends on what the difference between objective bindingness and subjective bindingness is meant to be, and I confess that I do not see a substantive difference.

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, the reason-providing consideration picked out concerns my pain, which is in *my* head. While others might claim that the fact that you have a headache is a putative reason for me to give you two aspirin, I say that alleviating your pain is not my end, and your pain is not 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 verses yours, my attitudes rather than yours, reason providing considerations internal to me rather than you—but they do not differentiate the nature of the favouring relation found in reasons. All they do is distinguish various considerations and persons from which favouring relations can flow, and different actions to which they can flow. In all these cases, the favouring or disfavouring relation would be of the same normative kind. I do not know what it would mean to say that some of these considerations favour objectively versus favour subjectively. They either favour or they do not, and if they favour, then we have a candidate for the queerness objection.

Perhaps there is an analogy with witches. Witches would be metaphysically queer in part because they would 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 that the queerness resides in spell casting quite generally. It does not matter what the spells affect. I think we can say the same kind of thing to those who claim that favouring relations flow only from ends. The queerness objection applies to the favouring relations quite generally, and it does not matter wherefrom the favouring 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 basic moral reasons claim to be *intrinsically* reason providing, 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 basic moral reasons purport to be intrinsically reason-providing 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 favouring relation to obtain. We have symbolized these circumstances with the predicate C and they might include available alternatives and genuine agency.<sup>19</sup> Even understanding this kind of contingency, Humeans might find something inexplicable in the presence of favouring relations that do not flow from ends.

Yet anyone who believes in reasons of any sort will have trouble explaining why the

favouring relations flow from the particular favourers that they in fact flow from. If favouring 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 a relationship between ends and actions.<sup>20</sup>

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’ reason relations are metaphysically queer, one does not escape the queerness by relocating their point of origin somewhere in ends. At the overall level, you cannot get rid of the to-be-doneness, 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.

## VI. Epistemic Queerness

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 focused on justification and knowledge. Often talk of epistemic reasons comes under another guise, such as the epistemic support relations between some body of evidence and beliefs. Such discussions usually focus on the *relata* of these support relations, or on the structure of various chains of epistemic support (whether they be infinite, circular, grounded in foundations, or context sensitive).<sup>21</sup> In these epistemic support relations there are those considerations that do the supporting and those beliefs that are supported, but it is the support relation between the two that will concern us.

Epistemic support relations nicely fit the schema for the reason predicate,  $R(F, A, \Phi)$  in  $C$ , where  $\Phi$ ing is the formation of a belief, and the various  $F$ s are evidentials, like appearances,

memories, and beliefs, or propositions or facts concerning these. So it looks like they will share the same conceptual structure and core semantic commitments as any other reason. Though there may be inter-domain differences in the things expressed by  $F$ ,  $A$ ,  $\Phi$ , and  $C$ , the way they are related to form a reason is the same.

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 would seem that this amounts to the redly appearance counting in favour 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, or abduction/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 reason predicate has a fairly straightforward application.

If the favouring relation is metaphysically suspect, it is suspect in the epistemic domain as well. It is not the putative favourers or the things favoured that raise metaphysical concerns. Our ontology is not so austere as to rule out beliefs, appearances, memories, and other considerations and actions expressed by the  $F$  and  $\Phi$  predicates in the epistemic cases. It is the favouring relations that flow from these familiar items that raise concerns.

A full defence of the idea that support relations, or epistemic reason relations, are both indispensable to epistemology and as mysterious as their practical counterparts would require more space than I can give it here. But we can anticipate likely replies to the charge and sketch a rejoinder well enough to provide a powerful case that epistemic reasons would be as queer as any other. The most likely strategy is to reduce the support or favouring in epistemology by identifying it with probabilistic, reliabilistic or some similar truth-connected relation. However, epistemology is not just about determining what beliefs are likely true in some sense, for there is the additional thought that one has reason to form the beliefs that are made likely true by one's evidence. If we dispense with support or favouring relations, we no longer have the resources to say anything about which beliefs one *should* hold based on one's evidence. Perhaps belief B is most likely true on A's evidence, but without invoking favouring relations we cannot say that A has any reason to believe B.

Consequently, epistemic reason relations will not be exhausted by any non-normative relational property. Not only do we fail to isolate moral reasons with the queerness objection, but we cannot isolate practical reasons more generally.

## **VII. Putting Queerness Behind Us**

By considering queerness we have unmasked the conceptual structure and a core semantic commitment of reason claims across the board (in theoretical and practical realms). 'Reason' is essentially a relational predicate that purports to express normative relations, which we have glossed as favouring and disfavouring relations. If this engenders a queer metaphysics, and if queerness constitutes a decisive objection, then there are no favouring relations and so no reasons. This is a meta-normative point. For all that is said here, some Humean view might be right. Indeed, many Humeans find their position *obvious* and on those grounds they might

consider basic moral reasons ‘queer,’ not in a metaphysical sense, but as a way of expressing incredulity. Be that as it may, what they find obvious threatens to introduce the very same kind of metaphysical queerness that has traditionally burdened morality.

There is the possibility of avoiding queerness across the board, as Alan Gibbard tries to do with his expressivist account of reasons. I have not weighed in on the possibility of expressivism about reasons *tout court*, or competitors such as non-naturalist realism about reasons *tout court*, but I have tried to underwrite the need for such unrestricted normative views. The deep questions traditionally posed in *metaethics* find application in *meta-normativity* more generally. No one with a position on reasons can claim innocence. They must all grapple with questions historically posed to ethics alone.

Let me close by hinting at why I think expressivism offers an inadequate normative semantics, and why metaphysical queerness remains a concern for reason realists. By positing a normative attitude that is expressed through reason talk, expressivists would fail to respect the idea that the favouring seems to be part of the content of one’s reason judgment rather than part of the attitude one is expressing. To put it succinctly, when I say you have reason to  $\Phi$  it is not *I* that favours your  $\Phi$ ing, at least not at base. It is some consideration in the world that favours your  $\Phi$ ing, whether it concerns the pain of others or your own desires, or what have you. On such grounds I can come to favour your actions and attitudes as well, but that is secondary to seeing some considerations in the world as reason providing.

I think present observations raise a real sceptical challenge for normativity *tout court*, though not because queerness is a direct objection to favouring relations. Rather, queerness highlights the need for non-sceptics to determine which favouring relations hold – instrumental, internalist, externalist, moral, epistemic, etc. The way to make progress in normativity is to

argue that favouring relations flow between certain relata, and not others. And establishing these facts requires a normative methodology. Appealing to intuition alone seems insufficient to vindicate the realist purport of reasons. As I have said, some Humeans find instrumentalism or reason internalism obvious, and those who embrace basic moral reasons probably feel the same way, but I do not see how this felt confidence vindicates either view. This is not the place to propose a theory as to how to meet such difficult argumentative burdens, but suffice it to say that we have, rightly, rejected queerness as a way of adjudicating between first-order normative positions about what reasons there are and what reasons there are not.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Basic reasons just are reasons not derived from yet further reasons. To illustrate, one basic moral reason might be a reason to help those in need, underived from reasons to pursue my beneficent ends.

<sup>2</sup> David Schmitz offers a particularly clear-eyed statement of the view: ‘Our goals give us reasons for action. I say this without presuming that the goals themselves are reasonable . . . Nevertheless, once we have an end, simply having it gives us reasons for action.’ [1996: 8].

<sup>3</sup> In this piece I refer to the views expressed in Foot’s [1972] paper “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives.” I do not take issue with her more recent positions.

<sup>4</sup> By way of recent example, Sinnott-Armstrong [2006] is a Pyrrhonian moral sceptic. He thinks moral propositions cannot be adequately justified against contrast classes that include sceptical views like moral nihilism, so he relies on non-sceptical epistemological grounds to run his moral scepticism.

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that this is a meta-normative point. I take no stand on which theory of reasons is correct. In the practical realm we have many options. Under *instrumentalism*, one only has basic reasons to advance one’s ends, and instrumental reasons to take the means to one’s ends. [See Harman 1975: 9; Mackie 1977: 33; and Dreier 1997]. A variant on this view, given by Schroeder [2007] is that reasons are propositions that help to explain why one’s actions promote the objects of one’s desires. According to *internalism*, one’s reasons must be suitably anchored to one’s idealized subjective motivational set, where one’s subjective motivational set is broadly construed to include all desire-type states, and idealization requires that the desires survive full information and sound (roughly Humean) reasoning. [See Williams 1981, 1995a, 1995b; Smith 1994, 2004; and Pettit and Smith 2006]. Railton [1986] advocates a view similar to reason internalism with the important addition that one’s interests can be reason providing.

*Externalism* we can define negatively as the denial of internalism. [See Scanlon 1998; Parfit 1997; Dancy 2004; Raz 2005; and myself, Bedke 2008]. I also take no stand on which theory of epistemic reasons is correct, where the options are similarly diverse.

<sup>6</sup> 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’ expresses 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.

<sup>7</sup> Exactly how reasons compete and combine with one another is a complex matter.

Unfortunately, this is not the place to further articulate the structure of reasons space, including the differential roles of *prima facie* reasons, *pro tanto* reasons, sufficient reasons, conclusive reasons, agent relative reasons, agent neutral reasons, action reasons, outcome reasons, etc. The metaphysical issues will not turn on these subtleties.

<sup>8</sup> It might be argued that some oughts, requirement or obligations are not built out of reasons, but out of values, such as what outcomes or states of affairs are better than others, and which of these is the best possible. Perhaps so, but an ought of what is best would be no less queer than an ought of what is most favoured by reasons. First, a buck passing account that reduces values to reasons, discussed below, is extremely attractive, and if it is right there is no sharp distinction between the ought of reasons and the ought of values. Second, even if values cannot be reduced to reasons, at the very least values entail reasons. It makes no sense to say that X is normatively better than Y unless someone has reason to regard X differently than Y, e.g., more reason, or a different kind of reason, to promote X as compared to Y. So even value-based oughts entail reasons that are non-end-given, in our sense, and it is the normative bindingness of non-end-given reasons that really puzzles moral sceptics. Irreducible in-the-world values might generate *additional* sceptical concerns (see section V(A), below), but all normative moral theories at a minimum have to handle the queerness in reasons.

<sup>9</sup> Foot [1972] distinguishes two ways in which a norm can be categorical. One option is for the norm’s content to be categorical, as when the imperative gives instructions that are insensitive to one’s contingent ends. Another sense of categoricity applies when that categorical content is normatively binding. I prefer to reserve the term ‘categorical’ for the first use, and simply call all binding force normative force.

<sup>10</sup> 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 one’s 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 that

reasons only flow from motivations. Ergo, the motivational requirement is not conceptually grounded.

<sup>11</sup> Derek Parfit claims that the following fact is normative: that jumping is my only way to save my life *gives me a reason* to jump. [1997: 124, emphasis added]. David McNaughton, and Piers Rawling claim that the following is a normative fact: that A would enjoy fell-walking *gives A a reason* to fell-walk. [2003: 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 are relational. While I am not necessarily committed to their being three-placed, as represented above, I am committed to their relational nature.

<sup>12</sup> This dispute over what Andy should do makes a point similar to the one Hampton makes with her curmudgeon character [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 predictive theory of human behaviour. I agree.

<sup>13</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggestion this kind of example to me.

<sup>14</sup> Here I indicate my line of response to reductive theories of reasons. For more on this see [Bedke unpublished manuscript].

<sup>15</sup> Conversely, if all we get are objective value properties with no reason to bring about that which is good, or avoid that which is bad, ethics becomes a hollow shell of what it purported to be, and it is open to sceptical concerns that might not plague other disciplines.

<sup>16</sup> There is another view according to which the value properties supervene on the natural properties, but the favouring still flows from the naturalized considerations, not the non-natural value considerations [see Stratton-Lake and Hooker 2006]. This would also introduced value properties as a second class of potentially queer properties, so the buck passing view is to be preferred.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Joyce is admirably clear on this point. 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’ [2001: 30].

<sup>18</sup> Nagel says ‘Internalism is the view that the presence of a motivation for acting morally is guaranteed by the truth of ethical propositions themselves’ [1970: 7]. Brink says that internalism is the thesis that ‘the recognition of moral facts itself either necessarily motivates or necessarily provides reasons for action’ [1984: 113]. And Korsgaard says ‘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’ [1996: 81].

<sup>19</sup> There might be other things that have to be in the background for this reason-providing relation to hold in particular cases, but they would not be a proper part of the favouring relation. In Dancy’s terminology, they would be enablers [2004: 38-43].

<sup>20</sup> There is a brand of practical reasons we might call perspectival reasons [see Shafer-Landau 2003: 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. This view does not escape the favouring relation characteristic of all reasons, it merely makes the favouring relation a bit elusive by constructing it out of the attitudes of particular

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agents. Because it is this favouring relation that is objectively binding, even this view will not evade a queerness objection.

<sup>21</sup> Juan Comesana has focused on the support relation itself, understood as a reason relation. He argues that epistemic support relations provide problems for epistemic internalism, and suggests a move to externalism [2005: 60]. As far as I can see, the internal-external debate in epistemology would concern one of the relata of the support relation, viz., Fs, the things that support beliefs. The nature of the support relation, which is our concern, seems to be orthogonal to the internalism-externalism debate.

<sup>22</sup> Many thanks to Dave Schmitz, Mark Timmons, Lee Shepski and two anonymous referees for helpful comments on this paper.