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#### **Author**

Portmore, Douglas W.

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# *The Teleological Conception of Practical Reasons\**

DOUGLAS W. PORTMORE

*Arizona State University*

NOTE TO ISUS X PARTICIPANTS: Due to some unfortunate personal circumstances, I am unable to attend the conference. I am, however, happy to respond to comments and questions by email. Please send them to [douglas.portmore@asu.edu](mailto:douglas.portmore@asu.edu).

**Abstract:** I defend the teleological conception of practical reasons (or ‘TCR’ for short), which holds that “since any rational action must aim at some result, reasons that bear on whether to perform an action must appeal to the desirability or undesirability of having that result occur, taking into account also the intrinsic value of the act itself” (Scanlon 1998, 84). On this conception, practical reasoning involves, first, determining which ends there are reason to desire and, second, determining which available action will best achieve those ends. I offer a more precise statement of the view and then clear up some common misconceptions about it, such as: (1) that TCR is incompatible with the idea that concrete entities (e.g., persons, animals, and things), not states of affairs, are the primary bearers of intrinsic value; (2) that TCR is incompatible with appropriately valuing goods such as friendship, and (3) that TCR is incompatible with the view that attitudes such as belief and blame are rationally justified on non-instrumental grounds. And I rebut Scanlon’s putative counterexamples to TCR, where putatively “many of the reasons bearing on an action concern not the desirability of outcomes but rather the eligibility or ineligibility of various other reasons” (Scanlon 1998, 84). Lastly, I provide an argument for TCR.

THE TELEOLOGICAL CONCEPTION of practical reasons holds that “since any rational action must aim at some result, reasons that bear on whether to perform an action must appeal to the desirability or undesirability of having that result occur, taking into account also the intrinsic value of the act itself” (Scanlon 1998, 84). On this conception, practical reasoning involves, first, determining which ends there are reason to desire and, second, determining which available actions will best achieve those ends. Whether this is the correct conception of practical reasons is not only important in its own right, but also important in virtue of its potential implications for what sort of moral theory we should accept—at least, it will have such implications if we assume, as many philosophers do, that an agent can be morally required to perform an act only if she has most reason to perform that act.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I argue that the teleological conception is

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indeed the correct conception of practical reasons (i.e., normative reasons for action).<sup>2</sup>

The paper has the following structure. In section 1, I offer a more precise statement of the teleological conception of (practical) reasons (or ‘TCR’ for short), showing that the view consists in three distinct claims. Then, in section 2, I clear up some common and potential misconceptions about the view. In section 3, I rebut Scanlon’s putative counterexamples to TCR, cases where putatively “many of the reasons bearing on an action concern not the desirability of outcomes but rather the eligibility or ineligibility of various other reasons” (Scanlon 1998, 84). And finally, in section 4, I provide arguments for each of TCR’s three claims and for TCR as a whole.

### 1. A more precise statement of the view

Let me start off by simply stating the view as precisely as I can. Let  $a_1, a_2, a_3, \dots, a_n$  be the set of mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive act alternatives available to a subject,  $S$ . Let  $o_1, o_2, o_3, \dots, o_n$  be their corresponding outcomes, where an act’s outcome is construed broadly as the possible world that will be actual if the act is performed.<sup>3</sup> More precisely, then, the teleological conception of reasons can be stated as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Stroud (1998) calls this the *overridingness thesis*. It is also sometimes called *moral rationalism*. Unlike Stroud, I remain neutral as to whether this thesis is a conceptual or substantive truth. For a defense of this thesis, see Smith (1994, chap. 3), Stroud (1998), and van Roojen (2007). For more on the implications of this thesis for moral theorizing, see Portmore (2008).

<sup>2</sup> Whenever I use the term ‘reasons’ in an unqualified way, I will be referring to practical reasons, i.e., normative reasons for action. A normative reason for action is some fact that counts in favor of the agent’s performing the action. Normative reasons contrast with explanatory reasons (i.e., facts that explain why the agent performed the act). One particularly important subclass of explanatory reasons is the set of motivating reasons, the facts that motivated the agent to perform the act—that is, the facts that the agent took to be her reasons for performing the act. See Darwall (2006, 285).

<sup>3</sup> I will assume that for each act available to  $S$  there is some determinate fact as to what the world would be like were  $S$  to perform that act. This assumption is sometimes called *counterfactual determinism*—see, e.g., Bykvist (2003, 30). Although this assumption is controversial, nothing that I will say here hangs on it. I make the assumption only for the sake of simplifying the presentation. If counterfactual determinism is false, then instead of correlating each act with a unique possible world, we will need to correlate each act with a probability distribution over the set of possible worlds that might be actualized if  $S$  were to perform that act.

**TCR** (1) S has more reason to perform  $a_i$  than to perform  $a_j$  if S has more reason to desire that  $o_i$  obtains than to desire that  $o_j$  obtains. (2) S has more reason to perform  $a_i$  than to perform  $a_j$  only if S has more reason to desire that  $o_i$  obtains than to desire that  $o_j$  obtains. And (3) if S has more reason to perform  $a_i$  than to perform  $a_j$ , then what makes this so is the fact that S has more reason to desire that  $o_i$  obtains than to desire that  $o_j$  obtains.<sup>4</sup>

Having stated the view as precisely as I can, let me now proceed to clarify it, explaining, in the process, how and why it deviates from the Scanlon's initial formulation, as given in the above quote.

Note, first, that in contrast to Scanlon I have chosen to formulate TCR broadly in terms of reasons to desire total outcomes, and not narrowly in terms of reasons to desire those ends that S aims to produce. Note, then, that as I've formulated the view it is not restricted to only the causal consequences of actions.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, it would be odd for the teleologist (i.e., the proponent of TCR) to exclude in advance from consideration any of the ways that the world might change as a result of S's performing some act. For instance, one way the world changes when S performs, say,  $a_1$  is that the world becomes one in which S has performed  $a_1$ . And, as a result of S's having performed  $a_1$ , it may also thereby be true that S has fulfilled her past promise to do so.<sup>6</sup> Since all these ways in which the world might change could potentially make a difference as to whether or not S ought to desire  $o_1$  and, if so, to what degree, we should formulate TCR, as I have, so that it does not exclude from consideration such possibly relevant non-causal effects.

Second, unlike Scanlon, I have formulated TCR in terms of reasons to desire outcomes as opposed to the desirability of outcomes. To see why,

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<sup>4</sup> More concisely, then, S has more reason to perform  $a_i$  than to perform  $a_j$  just when, and because, S has more reason to desire that  $o_i$  obtains than to desire that  $o_j$  obtains. But, for my purposes, it will be useful to keep the three claims of which TCR is composed clearly separated. Smith (2006) formulates the view a bit differently: "(x)(t)(x at t has all things considered reason to  $\varphi$  in circumstances C iff  $\varphi$ -ing is the unique action of those x can perform at t that brings about what x would desire most happens in C if he had a desire set that satisfied all requirements of...reason."

<sup>5</sup> Even critics of TCR admit that teleologists can be concerned with more than just the causal consequences of acts. See, for instance, Scanlon (1998, 80 & 84) and Wallace (2005, 26-27).

<sup>6</sup> Thus TCR will not be exclusively forward-looking. The teleologist can hold that  $o_1$  is desirable in virtue of the fact that it is true in that world that S has performed  $a_1$  and that her having done so constitutes the fulfillment of her past promise to do so. For more on this point, see Sturgeon (1996, 511-514) and Anderson (1996, 541).

we must first get clear on what the difference is. To say that that an outcome,  $o_i$ , is desirable is to say that  $o_i$  is worthy of being desired—that there are sufficiently weighty reasons of the right kind to desire that  $o_i$  obtains. But what are the right kinds of reasons to desire that  $o_i$  obtains? If facts such as the fact that an evil demon will torture me unless I desire that  $o_i$  obtains constitute genuine reasons for me to desire that  $o_i$  obtains and not just reasons for me to desire, and to act so as to ensure, that I desire that  $o_i$  obtains, then the phrase ‘the right kind of reasons’ should be construed so as to exclude such reasons. For even if the fact that an evil demon will torture me unless I desire that  $o_i$  obtains constitutes a genuine reasons for me to desire that  $o_i$  obtains, it has no bearing on whether, or to what extent,  $o_i$ ’s obtaining is desirable.<sup>7</sup>

Also, it seems that someone who bears some special relation to an individual who would be benefit from  $o_i$ ’s obtaining could have weightier reasons to prefer  $o_i$ ’s obtaining to  $o_j$ ’s obtaining, whereas someone who bears some special relation to an individual who would be benefit from  $o_j$ ’s obtaining could have weightier reasons to prefer  $o_j$ ’s obtaining to  $o_i$ ’s obtaining. Yet, to say that  $o_i$ ’s obtaining is more desirable (i.e., preferable) to  $o_j$ ’s obtaining is to say that, for *everyone*, the set of all the right kind of reasons for them to prefer  $o_i$ ’s obtaining to  $o_j$ ’s obtaining is weightier than the set of all the right kind of reasons for them to prefer  $o_j$ ’s obtaining to  $o_i$ ’s obtaining.<sup>8</sup> To illustrate, consider that, in contrast to some stranger, I might have weightier reasons to prefer that my child lives, whereas he has weightier reasons to prefer that his child lives. But it would be odd to say that this is because the outcome where my child goes on living is, other things being equal, more desirable than the outcome where his child goes on living. Other things being equal, the outcome where my child lives is neither more nor less desirable than the outcome where his child lives. So although one can have *partial* reasons for preferring one outcome to another, this does not entail that the one is any more desirable than the other.<sup>9</sup> And, thus, the phrase ‘the right kind of reasons’ must be construed so as to exclude such *partial reasons* for preferring one outcome to another.

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<sup>7</sup> This is known as the *wrong-kind-of-reasons problem* for the buck-passing account of value (or desirability). For more on this problem and some potential solutions to it, see, for instance, Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004) and Parfit (2008).

<sup>8</sup> This is known as the partiality challenge. See Olson (2008) and Suikkanen (2008) for some potential solutions to this problem. In formulating this analysis of preferability, I’ve benefited from reading Schroeder (2008).

<sup>9</sup> I take it that ‘desirable’ is like ‘valuable’ in this sense. As Scanlon notes, “To claim that something is *valuable* (or that it is ‘of value’) is to claim that others also have reason to value

It is this last qualification that makes trouble for formulating TCR in terms of the desirability of outcomes. If TCR is to be formulated in terms of desirability and desirability is to be understood in terms of impartial reasons for desiring, then TCR will automatically exclude agent-relative reasons for action, such as the reason I have to save my child over some stranger's child, other things being equal. Yet there is no reason why the teleologist should exclude the possibility of agent-relative reasons for action, as even critics of TCR admit. Scanlon, for instance, says, "The teleological structure I have described is often taken to characterize not only 'the good' impartially understood, but also the good from a particular individual's point of view (the way she has reason to want things to go)" (1998, 81).<sup>10</sup> So if we are to allow that one agent might have a reason to bring about a state of affairs that another has no reason to bring about and that one agent might have more reason to bring about some state of affairs than another agent does, we should eschew talk of the desirability of states of affairs and talk instead of the reasons various agents have to desire those states of affairs, where some of these reason will be partial reasons.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, I will occasionally revert back to talking about the desirability of states of affairs, since this is the language that TCR's critics so often employ. I do this only so as to engage these critics on their own terms.

Third, when I talk about reasons to perform an action, I am, strictly speaking, referring to reasons to intend to perform that action. Most immediately, practical reasoning gives rise not to bodily movements, but to intentions. Of course, when all goes well, these intentions result in, say, some bodily movement and then we have an intentional action. Nevertheless, the immediate product of practical reasoning is an intention to perform some act, not the act itself (Scanlon 1998, 18-22). Having

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it, as you do" (1998, 95). And it seems that just as you can "quite properly, value some things more than others without claiming that they are more valuable" (1998, 95), you can properly desire some outcomes more than others do without claiming that they are more desirable.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Schroeder (2007) has convincingly argued that the notion that there is goodness from a particular individual's point of view—namely, the good-relative-to relation—that is distinct from what is *good for* that individual is just a theoretical posit that does not have anything to do with the word 'good' and that, therefore, might as well be called the "orange-relative-to relation." It is for this reason that I do not think that it is useful to talk of what is good or desirable from an individual's point of view, as Scanlon does.

<sup>11</sup> Given that Scanlon seems to equate what is "good [or desirable] from a particular individual's point of view" with "the way she has reason to want things to go" (1998, 81), he should have no objection to this friendly amendment.

clarified this, I will, however, sometimes (when it does not seem to matter) slip into the more customary way of speaking in terms of reasons for action when I really mean to be speaking of reasons to intend to perform some action.

Fourth, although some philosophers (e.g., Heuer 2004, 48) take a desire to be nothing more than just a disposition to act, where one desires that  $o_i$  obtains if and only if one is disposed to act so as to bring it about that  $o_i$  obtains (that is, to perform  $a_i$ ), I will use ‘desire’ in the more narrow, ordinary sense, such that one desires that  $o_i$  obtains only if one finds the prospect of  $o_i$ ’s obtaining in some way attractive or appealing. On this more narrow interpretation, a desire for  $o_i$  is sufficient for being motivated (to some extent) to perform  $a_i$ , but being motivated to perform  $a_i$  is not sufficient for desiring  $o_i$ . Thus, in Warren Quinn’s famous example of a man who has a compulsive urge that disposes him to turn on every radio he sees despite his failing to see anything appealing about either these acts themselves or their effects (1993, 236), we do not have a case of desire in the sense that I will be using the term. As I see it, then, having a desire involves a complicated set of dispositions to think, feel, and react in specified ways (Scanlon 1998, 21). A person who desires that  $o_i$  obtains will find the prospect of its obtaining appealing, will be to some extent motivated to perform  $a_i$ , and will, perhaps, have her attention directed insistently toward considerations that present themselves as counting in favor of  $o_i$ ’s obtaining (Scanlon 1998, 39).<sup>12</sup>

Fifth, to be a teleologist, it is not enough to accept the bi-conditional that is entailed by TCR-1 and TCR-2 (call this bi-conditional “TCR-1+2”); the teleologist must accept TCR-3 as well. Of course, TCR-3 is but one of three possible explanations for the correlation stated by TCR-1+2. To illustrate, let ‘P’ stand for ‘S has more reason to *perform*  $a_i$  than to *perform*  $a_j$ ’ and let ‘D’ stand for ‘S has more reason to *desire* that  $o_i$  obtains than to *desire* that  $o_j$  obtains’. The three possible explanations for TCR-1+2—that is, for the correlation between P and D—are: (i) ‘P, because D’, (ii) ‘D, because P’, or (iii) both ‘P, because B’ and ‘D, because B’—where, for instance, ‘B’ might stand for ‘ $o_i$  is *better* than  $o_j$ ’.<sup>13</sup> In defending TCR, I must not only defend

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<sup>12</sup> I am not sure whether the last of these three is essential to desiring, as the qualifier ‘perhaps’ is meant to indicate. For reasons to doubt that it is essential to desiring in the ordinary sense, see Chang (2004, esp. 65-66).

<sup>13</sup> These three explanations are analogues of the three possible causal explanations for a correlation between events  $a$  and  $b$ : (1)  $a$  causes  $b$ , (2)  $b$  causes  $a$ , or (3)  $a$  and  $b$  have a common cause. I thank Mark Schroeder and Shyam Nair for pointing out the need to

TCR-1+2, but also argue that it is (i) as opposed to (ii) or (iii) that explains TCR-1+2; that is, I must defend TCR-3 in addition to both TCR-1 and TCR-2. But before I proceed to defend TCR, I will first try to clear up some actual and potential misconceptions about the view.

## 2. Clearing up some misconceptions about TCR

There are a number of misconceptions about TCR that have led philosophers to reject TCR for mistaken reasons. Below, I try to clear up some of these misconceptions.

*2.1 TCR is compatible with value concretism:* Although Scanlon (1998, 79-81) lumps the two together, TCR is distinct from, and independent of, *value abstractism*: the view that the sole or primary bearers of intrinsic value are certain abstracta—facts, outcomes, states of affairs, or possible worlds. On value abstractism, there is only one kind of value, the kind that is to be promoted, and so the only proper response to value is to desire and promote it, ensuring that there is as much of it as possible. The contrary view—the view that the fundamental bearers of intrinsic value are concrete entities (e.g., persons, animals, and things)—is called *value concretism*.<sup>14</sup>

Contrary to what Scanlon and others (e.g., Anderson 1993; Wallace 1995) have claimed, there is no reason why the teleologist cannot accept value concretism.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the teleologist can accept all of the following: (a) that concrete entities—persons, animals, and things—are the primary bearers of intrinsic value; (b) that states of affairs generally have only extrinsic value in that they generally have no value apart from our valuing concrete entities;<sup>16</sup> (c) that “our basic evaluative attitudes—love, respect, consideration, honor, and so forth—are non-propositional...attitudes we take up immediately toward persons, animals, and things, not toward

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consider such common “cause” explanations. And I thank Schroeder for suggesting that someone might take B to be the common “cause.”

<sup>14</sup> I borrow the terms *concretism* and *abstractism* from Tännsjö (1999).

<sup>15</sup> Anderson uses the term ‘consequentialism’ as opposed to ‘teleology’. But she defines ‘consequentialism’ so broadly (see 1993, 30-31) that it is, in spirit, equivalent to TCR. She says, for instance, “consequentialism specifies our rational aims, and then tells us to adopt whatever intentions will best bring about those aims” (Anderson 1996, 539), which is exactly what TCR does. Thus, as Anderson uses the term, ‘consequentialism’ refers not to a moral theory but to a conception of practical reasons that is roughly equivalent to TCR.

<sup>16</sup> The reason for the qualifier ‘generally’ in (b) is that Anderson does allow for the possibility that a state of affairs can have intrinsic value if it is one that is intrinsically interesting. Anderson says, “Interest does seem to be an evaluative attitude that can take a state of affairs as its immediate and independent object. This is an exception to the general rule that states of affairs have no intrinsic value” (1993, 27).



facts" (Anderson 1993, 20); and (d) that value and our valuations are deeply pluralistic, that there are many ways that we experience things as valuable (e.g., as interesting, admirable, beautiful, etc.) and that there are many different kinds of value as well as different modes of valuing that are appropriate to each (e.g., "beautiful things are worthy of appreciation, rational beings of respect, sentient beings of consideration, virtuous ones of admiration, convenient things of use"—Anderson 1993, 11). TCR is compatible with all (a)-(d), as I will now explain.

As rational *creatures*, we appropriately respond to different sorts of things with different sorts of attitudes. We appropriately respond to beautiful objects by appreciating them, we appropriately respond to rational persons by respecting them, and we appropriately respond to desirable states of affairs by desiring their actualizations—at least, that's how we appropriately respond when we don't have weightier partial reasons against desiring their actualization. As rational *agents*, though, it is only the last of these three that is pertinent, for, as agents, we can only effect outcomes. We cannot effect valuable entities. A concrete entity is not the sort of thing that we can bring about or actualize through our actions. Of course, we can act so as to bring it about that, say, a rational person exists or that our actions express our respect for some rational person, but these are states of affairs, not concrete entities. As agents, we have the ability to actualize only certain possible worlds or states of affairs. Indeed, purposive action must aim at the realization of some state of affairs. So the teleologist can admit that we have reasons to have all sorts of different attitudes, including reasons to have certain non-propositional attitudes (such as, respect) toward various concrete entities (such as, rational persons). But the teleologist will insist that when it comes to the particular attitude of intending to act in some way, the reasons for having this attitude must always be grounded in the reasons that the agent has to desire that certain possible worlds or states of affairs are actualized. It is a misconception, however, that the teleologist is, in addition, committed to the denial of any of claims (a)-(d) above.<sup>17</sup>

2.2 *TCR is compatible with appropriately valuing goods such as friendship:* Another common misconception regarding TCR is that it is incompatible with the thought that with respect to goods such as science and friendship, taking them to be valuable is not simply, or even primarily, a matter of

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<sup>17</sup> This point is not particularly new, although it bears repeating given the stubborn persistence of this misconception. Others who have made essentially the same point include Arneson (2002) and Sturgeon (1996).

promoting certain states of affairs (cf. Scanlon 1998, 88). Take friendship. TCR does not imply, for instance, that the only reasons provided by my friend and our relationship are reasons to promote certain states of affairs. The teleologist can accept that I have reasons to care about my friend, to empathize with her pain, to take joy in her successes, etc., and that these are not reasons to promote certain states of affairs, but rather reasons to have certain non-propositional attitudes and feelings. TCR is, then, compatible with the thought that what lovers, friends, and family members value, fundamentally, is each other as opposed to certain states of affairs.

TCR is also compatible with the thought that a person who values friendship will see that what she has reason to do, first and foremost, is to be a good friend to her current friends and that these reasons are weightier than whatever reasons she has to cultivate new friendships or to foster good friendship relations among others (cf. Scanlon 1998, 88-89). The teleologist can even hold that my friendships generate agent-centered restrictions on my actions (cf. Anderson 1993, 73-74), such that I have more reason to refrain from betraying one of my own friends than to prevent more numerous others from betraying theirs. This is all possible given that TCR allows for agent-relative reasons. If there were only agent-neutral reasons, (e.g., agent-neutral reasons to promote friendships and to prevent friends from betraying one another), then I would often have sufficient reason to neglect one of my current friendships if I could thereby cultivate two or more new ones, and I would often have sufficient reason to betray one of my own friends if I could thereby prevent more numerous others from betraying theirs. But, as even critics of TCR admit (e.g., Scanlon 1998, 81), TCR is compatible with the existence of agent-relative reasons and thus with the idea that whereas *you* will have more reason to prefer that *your* friends are not betrayed, *I* will have more reason to prefer that *my* friends are not betrayed. And such agent-relative reasons to prefer the possible world where your friends as opposed to my friends are betrayed will, given TCR, generate agent-relative reasons for me to refrain from betraying one of my own friends even for the sake of preventing you from betraying two of yours.<sup>18</sup> And TCR certainly allows for the possibility that such reasons will be decisive and thereby generate an agent-centered restriction against betraying one's own friends even for the sake of preventing more numerous others from betraying theirs.

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<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the teleologist can even hold that I have more reason to prefer that my friends are betrayed by *you* than to prefer that they are betrayed by *me*. And such agent-relative reasons will, given TCR, generate agent-relative reasons for me to refrain from betraying one of my friends even for the sake of preventing you from betraying two of my friends.

Moreover, TCR is compatible with the claim that I should not abandon my current friends even for the sake of cultivating more numerous new friendships, for the teleologist can hold that I currently have good temporally-relative reasons for preferring the preservation of my current friendships to the creation of otherwise similar new friendships given the shared history that I have with my current friends and the lack of any shared history (at present) with those possible future friends (Hurka 2006, 238).<sup>19</sup> And not only can the teleologist accept that one should not destroy one's own current friendships for the sake of creating more numerous future friendships for oneself or for others, but also that, out of respect for friendships generally, one should not destroy someone else's friendship for the sake of preventing numerous others from doing the same. Again, because the teleologist can hold that there are agent-relative reasons for preferring one possible world to another, the teleologist can hold that I should prefer the state of affairs where, say, five others each destroy someone else's friendship to the state of affairs where I myself destroy someone else's friendship.

2.3 *TCR is compatible with the view that attitudes such as belief and blame are rationally justified on non-instrumental grounds:* Elizabeth Anderson has claimed that the teleologist is committed to the implausible view that all attitudes (blaming, believing, intending, etc.) are rationally justified on instrumental grounds—that is, on the grounds that the agent's having the given attitude would have desirable consequences. For instance, she claims that the teleologist (or what she calls the "consequentialist") must hold that beliefs "are justified to the degree that they bring about better states of affairs into existence" (Anderson 1993, 39). This is mistaken for at least two reasons. First, note that the teleologist does not even hold that whether one is rationally justified in having the intention to perform  $a_i$  is a function of the desirability of the consequences of one's having this attitude. TCR does not imply, for instance, that the fact that an evil demon has threatened to produce undesirable consequences unless you intend to perform  $a_i$  gives you a reason to intend to perform  $a_i$ . TCR implies that it is the fact that your *performing*  $a_i$  will have desirable consequences, not the fact that your *intending to perform*  $a_i$  will have desirable consequences, that provides you with a reason to intend to perform  $a_i$ .<sup>20</sup> Thus, it is the consequences of *the*

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<sup>19</sup> TCR should, in that case, read as follows: S has more reason to perform  $a_i$  at  $t$  than to perform  $a_j$  at  $t$  just when, and because, S has, at  $t$ , more reason to desire that  $o_i$  obtains than to desire that  $o_j$  obtains.

<sup>20</sup> To see that these can come apart, consider that one can, say, knock over a bucket without forming the intention to do so and that one can form the intention to do so without

*act*, not of *the intention* to perform the act, that is relevant on TCR. And so there is no way to generalize, as Anderson apparently does, from the claim that intending to do  $a_i$  is justified on the grounds that *performing*  $a_i$  is instrumental in bringing about certain desirable consequences to the claim that attitudes, such as believing that  $p$ , are justified on the grounds that *having this attitude* is instrumental in bringing about certain desirable consequences. It is just not analogous.

Second, even if it were true that the teleologist thought that whether or not intending to perform  $a_i$  was rationally justified depended on the desirability of the consequences of having this attitude, it is not clear why Anderson thinks that the teleologist is committed to the more general claim that this is true of *all* attitudes. Why can't the teleologist hold that what is true of intending to act is not true of other attitudes? In either case, then, the teleologist can accept, contrary to what Anderson claims, that whether a person has sufficient reason to believe that  $p$  depends on what her evidence is for the truth of  $p$  and not on the desirability of the consequences of her believing that  $p$ . Furthermore, Anderson is mistaken in thinking that the teleologist must hold that: "Blame should be meted out to wrongdoers only if it would deter future wrongdoing and to anyone else unlucky enough to be in a position where being made an example of (however unjustly) would deter further wrongdoing" (Anderson 1993, 40). There is no reason why the teleologist cannot hold that whether blaming someone is rationally justified depends only on whether that someone is blameworthy. To blame someone is to have a certain attitude toward that someone, but it is not the same attitude about which TCR has something to say, viz., intending to act. Of course, the teleologist is committed to the view that whether one is rationally justified in intending to act so as to criticize, punish, or otherwise censure someone does depend on the consequences of such an act. But this is distinct from the attitude of blaming someone, i.e., that of holding someone responsible for some wrongdoing. One can blame a person for her wrongdoing without intending to act so as to criticize, punish, or otherwise censure her. And the teleologist is not committed to the view that one should intend to act so as to punish someone if and only if doing so would deter future wrongdoing, for the teleologist could hold that there are generally decisive reasons to

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succeeding. On TCR, the reasons that one has to intend to knock over a bucket depend on what the world would be like if one knocked over the bucket (whether or not one does so intentionally), not on what the world would be like if one formed the intention to do so (whether or not one succeeds).

desire all and only those worlds in which one acts so as to punish those who are blameworthy.

2.4 *TCR is compatible with passing the normative buck from value to reasons:* Lastly, it should be noted that TCR is compatible with a buck-passing account of value, where the domain of reasons is taken to be explanatorily prior to the domain of value (cf. Wallace 2005)—thus the normative buck is passed from value to reasons. There is potential for confusion here, for Scanlon sometimes formulates the buck-passing account of value specifically in terms of reasons for *action*, and TCR does treat evaluative reasons (e.g., reasons to desire) as explanatorily prior to practical reasons (i.e., reasons for action).<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, TCR is compatible with the following more general formulation of the buck-passing account of value: *x*'s being good or valuable is just the purely formal, higher-order property of having other properties that provide sufficiently weighty reasons (of the right kind) to respond favorably toward *x*.<sup>22</sup> This leaves open what the relevant favorable response will be, and, arguably, it will vary depending on the kind of thing that is being evaluated. In the case of a rational person, the relevant response might be to have respect for that person. In the case of a valuable state of affairs, the relevant response might be to desire that it obtains. If this is right, then TCR is perfectly compatible with the buck-passing account of value. An agent-neutral teleologist could, for instance, hold that reasons for actions are a function of the value (or the desirability) of the states of affairs that those actions produce, but still ultimately pass the normative buck back to reasons by claiming that what it is for a state of affairs to be valuable/desirable is for it to have the purely formal, higher-order property of having other properties that provide sufficiently weighty reasons (of the right kind) to desire it.

### 3. Scanlon's putative counterexamples to TCR

Besides these misconceptions, some philosophers are led to reject TCR given putative counterexamples. Scanlon, for instance, uses examples to argue, as he puts it, that "many reasons bearing on an action concern not the desirability of outcomes but rather the eligibility or ineligibility of various other reasons..., and judging that a certain consideration does not count as a reason for action is not equivalent to assigning negative intrinsic

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<sup>21</sup> Scanlon says, for instance, that "to call something valuable is to say that it has other properties that provide reasons for behaving in certain ways with regard to it" (1998, 96).

<sup>22</sup> See note 7 and its associated passages in the body of the paper on why this parenthetical phrase might be necessary.

value to the occurrence of actions based on this reason" (1998, 84). Unfortunately, it is not clear what he is trying to establish by this. One possibility is that he is pointing out that there are sometimes reasons for *believing* (he says "judging") that a certain fact does not count as a reason to perform a given act and that these *epistemic* reasons (i.e., reasons for belief) do not concern the desirability of outcomes. But, then, this is no counterexample to TCR. To provide a counterexample to TCR, Scanlon must show that there are *practical* reasons (reasons for action) that do not concern the desirability of outcomes, not that there are *epistemic* reasons (reasons for belief) that do not concern the desirability of outcomes. As we saw in section 2.3, the teleologist can accept that reasons for belief do not concern the desirability of outcomes. But, perhaps, this is not the most charitable way to interpret Scanlon.

So let us consider his actual examples. In Chapter 1, Section 10, he provides examples where an agent "judge[s] one consideration, C, to be a reason for taking another consideration, D, not to be relevant to... [his or her] decision to pursue a certain line of action" (1998, 51). What he gives us, then, are not reasons that concern the eligibility of various other reasons, but rather reasons that concern whether or not one ought to *take* various other reasons into account in one's deliberations, and taking other reasons into account in one's deliberation is itself an action.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the reasons for or against taking other reasons into account in one's deliberations do seem to concern the comparative desirability of the outcomes associated with doing so and not doing so. Indeed, in the sorts of examples that Scanlon provides, the reason not to take a certain consideration into account in one's deliberations is that doing so would have an undesirable effect. And so, Scanlon's putative "counterexamples" are not counterexamples after all.

It seems, then, that Scanlon may be conflating reasons for and against performing an act,  $a_i$ , with reasons for and against taking into account

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<sup>23</sup> The verb 'take' has many senses. In one sense, to take something not to be relevant is to suppose it not to be, or to regard it not to be, relevant with the implication that this supposition may be contrary to fact. This is how I am interpreting Scanlon here. Thus I am assuming that, by the phrase "taking another consideration, D, not to be relevant," he means "regarding/treating another consideration, D, as being irrelevant (whether or not it is, in fact, relevant)" and thus equivalently as "deciding not to take D into account in one's deliberations." If instead Scanlon is using his phrase to mean "believing D not to be relevant," then he is not talking about reasons for actions (or, as he says, "reasons bearing on an action"), but is instead talking about reasons for belief. If he is talking about such epistemic reasons, then, as I explained above, this poses no problem for TCR, which instead concerns practical reasons.

various considerations when deciding whether to perform  $a_i$ . But the act of either ignoring or taking into account various considerations when deciding whether to perform  $a_i$  is not the act of performing  $a_i$ , but instead the act of performing some other act, say,  $a_j$ . So let  $a_j$  be the act of taking into account certain considerations when deciding whether to perform  $a_i$ . It seems that when we consider whether to perform  $a_j$ , we should, as TCR implies, consider the agent's reasons for and against desiring that  $o_i$  obtains. Thus TCR does not deny that the reasons for and against doing  $a_j$  (i.e., taking into account certain considerations when deciding whether to  $x$ ) may have nothing to do with the reasons for and against desiring that  $o_i$  obtains. What it denies is only that the reasons for and against doing  $a_j$  may have nothing to do with the reasons for and against desiring that  $o_j$  obtains. And none of Scanlon's examples repudiate this, as we will see presently.

Consider one of Scanlon's main examples, one where I have met someone for a game of tennis. Assume that I have determined that there are no strong reasons for or against my playing to win so that whether I have reason to play to win just depends on what I would enjoy doing at the moment. And assume that what I would enjoy most at this moment is playing to win and so this is what I have decided to do. Given all this, Scanlon claims, contrary to TCR, that the fact that my succeeding in making a certain strategic shot might make my opponent feel crushed or disappointed just is not relevant to my decision as to whether or not to make the shot. But this seems to be the wrong conclusion to draw. Scanlon never says what consideration here is the reason for not taking this other consideration (that my opponent might feel crushed) into account when deciding whether or not to make this strategic shot, but it is clear that it is some pragmatic consideration such as the fact that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to play to win while taking these sorts of considerations into account, or it may be the fact that one cannot enjoy a good competitive game if one is constantly worrying about whether one's opponent's feelings might get hurt. But notice that we are now appealing to the desirability of taking one's opponent's feelings into account, which is precisely what the teleologist holds that we must do. The fact that we are not appealing to the desirability of making the strategic shot and weighing the desirability of the outcome where one makes the shot against the desirability of the outcome where one does not make the shot is neither here nor there. So it seems that this example shows only that the desirability or undesirability of embarrassing my opponent is not relevant to my decision of whether or not to ignore such considerations. It does not,

however, show that the desirability or undesirability of embarrassing my opponent is not relevant to whether or not I should make the shot.

Thus there are two practical decisions in this case, not one. The first is whether or not to make the conscious decision to ignore certain considerations. The second is whether or not to make the shot. In the case of the first decision, I should appeal to the desirability of the result of my doing so. In the case of the second decision, I should also appeal to the desirability of the result of my doing so, unless, as a result of the first decision, I have concluded that I should ignore such considerations. But even if I should ignore such considerations, it does not follow that TCR is false. The fact that making the shot would embarrass my opponent does seem to be a reason not to take the shot; it is just that I have made the prior decision to block such considerations from entering into my subsequent deliberations, and for good reason.

Let us consider another one of Scanlon's example. As Scanlon points out, a good search committee member will have a reason to put personal considerations aside when deciding which candidate to recommend to the department. Scanlon does not say what this reason is for bracketing off these personal considerations, but clearly it is the fact that one makes an implicit commitment to represent the interests of the department as a whole in taking up such a position. So the fact that what I want most is to hire a candidate who might potentially be a good personal friend is not something that I, as a member of the search committee, should consider when making my decision about whom to recommend to the department. And the fact that I have made an implicit commitment to bracket off such considerations when deciding whether to recommend someone to the department is a reason to do so. Does this in any way impugn TCR? To impugn TCR, this example would have to show either (a) that here is a case where my reason to perform  $a_i$  does not appeal at all to the desirability of  $o_i$  vis-à-vis its alternatives or (b) that here is a case where something concerning the desirability or undesirability of  $o_i$  does not constitute a reason for or against my performing  $a_i$ . Neither is the case. It seems that the fact that I will have violated my implicit commitment to my colleagues if I recommend a suboptimal candidate on the basis that hiring this candidate would be best for me does count as a reason to prefer the outcome where I instead recommend the candidate that is best for the department overall. And it seems that the fact that hiring a given candidate would be, self-interestedly speaking, best for me does count as a reason to recommend him or her to the department—admittedly, though, one that is overridden by the moral reason that I have to keep my commitments.



I conclude, then, that Scanlon's examples provide us with no good grounds for rejecting TCR. Scanlon erroneously assumes that if one has a reason to ignore a consideration for performing  $a_i$  in a given context, then that means that it is not a relevant consideration. But the fact that a certain consideration should be ignored when deciding whether or not to perform  $a_i$  does not show it is irrelevant as to whether or not one should perform  $a_i$ .

#### 4. In defense of TCR

Having argued that many of the reasons that philosophers have given for rejecting TCR are not in fact good reasons, I will now argue that there are good reasons to accept each of TCR's three claims. Furthermore, I will argue that there are good reasons for accepting TCR that go beyond what reasons there are for accepting each of its three claims.

*4.1 In defense of TCR-1:* According to TCR-1, if S has more reason to desire that  $o_i$  obtains than to desire that  $o_j$  obtains, then S has more reason to perform  $a_i$  than to perform  $a_j$ . Assuming that reasons for preferring  $o_i$  to  $o_j$  are reasons for making  $o_i$  as opposed to  $o_j$  one's end, then TCR-1 just follows from the hypothetical imperative (i.e., the principle of means-end rationality): a person who wills an end must, insofar as she is rational, either take the necessary means to that end or abandon that end. As Darwall notes, the hypothetical imperative is a principle of *relative rationality*, and, as such, it describes the transfer of reasons from ends to means.<sup>24</sup> "Reasons for me to make something my end are, owing to the hypothetical imperative, equally reasons for me to take the necessary means to it" (Darwall 1983, 16).<sup>25</sup> Since the antecedent of TCR-1 clearly specifies a good reason for S to make  $o_i$  as opposed to  $o_j$  her end (namely, that she has overall reason to prefer  $o_i$  to  $o_j$ ), it follows from the hypothetical imperative that S has a good reason to take the necessary means to ensuring that  $o_i$  as opposed to  $o_j$  obtains, which is to perform  $a_i$  as opposed to  $a_j$ .

It might be objected, though, that from the fact that one has a reason to desire  $\varphi$ , it does not follow that one has a reason to make  $\varphi$  one's end, for there is a difference between desiring that some state of affairs obtains and taking its actualization as one's end. To have an end, as opposed to a mere desire, one must intend to bring it about through one's own actions. Thus,

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<sup>24</sup> A principle of relative rationality specifies only what you have reason to do relative to some assumption about what ends you have reason to have. See Darwall (1983, 14-17).

<sup>25</sup> As Darwall notes, the principle of means-end rationality does "*not* tell the agent, if A is your end and B the only means, then you should do B." See Darwall (2006, 294).

although I can desire that extraterrestrial, intelligent life exists, I cannot take this as my end given that there is nothing that I can do to bring this about. So I can have a reason to desire  $\varphi$  but no reason to make  $\varphi$  my end, as where  $\varphi$  is something that I cannot bring about through my own actions. Also, I can have a reason to desire  $\varphi$  but insufficient reason to make  $\varphi$  my end if I have more reason to desire some alternative, say,  $\psi$ . But, if, by contrast, I have more reason to desire  $\varphi$  than to desire  $\psi$ , and if they are both something that I can bring about through my own actions, then this does seem to provide me with sufficient reason for making  $\varphi$  as opposed to  $\psi$  my end. And such is the case with  $o_i$  and  $o_j$ . The outcomes  $o_i$  and  $o_j$  are, by stipulation, two mutually exclusive states of affairs that the agent,  $S$ , can bring about through her own actions. Thus, the fact that  $S$  has more reason to desire that  $o_i$  obtains than to desire that  $o_j$  obtains provides  $S$  with sufficient reason to make  $o_i$  as opposed to  $o_j$  her end, which in turn provides  $S$  with sufficient reason to perform  $a_i$  as opposed to  $a_j$  when faced with the choice of doing one or the other—or so, at least, the principle of means-end rationality implies.

Nevertheless, a critic might insist that an agent can have good reason to desire  $\varphi$  and yet not have sufficient reason to make  $\varphi$  her end. Indeed, the critic might even claim that such an agent could have decisive reason not to make  $\varphi$  her end. Consider, for instance, that I might have good agent-neutral reason to prefer, other things being equal, a world in which there has been only one murder to a world in which there has been five comparable murders. But, even so, I could have a decisive agent-relative reason not to make murder my end, even if committing murder is the only way that I can prevent five others from each committing some comparable murder. The thought might be that I have a decisive reason never to act in a way that fails to *express* respect for some autonomous being and that, by murdering one autonomous being to prevent five others from doing the same, I would be doing just that.

But note that TCR is compatible with the thought that there are decisive reasons never to act in a way that fails to *express* respect for some autonomous being, for the teleologist can claim that an agent always has decisive reasons to prefer the world in which numerous others fail to express respect for autonomous beings by committing murder to the world in which she *herself* fails to express respect for an autonomous being by committing murder. What TCR does not allow for is the suggestion that she might have a decisive reason not to commit a murder even though she has more reason to desire the possible world in which she commits murder to the possible world in which she does not, the latter being the only other

available alternative. Such a suggestion would be quite puzzling, for, in that case, she should, prior to action, hope that she will do what she has decisive reason not to do—after all, it seems that she should hope for the world that she has most reason to want to be actual.<sup>26</sup> So it seems that whatever reasons that might be thought of as reasons not to make something (e.g., murder) one's end will be reasons to prefer the world in which one does not make that one's end to the world in which one does make that one's end. And, thus, we should think that it will never be the case that S has more reason to desire that  $o_i$  obtains than to desire that  $o_j$  obtains but more reason to make  $o_j$  as opposed to  $o_i$  her end.

If the foregoing is right, then TCR-1 follows from the principle of means-end rationality: the principle that holds that if you have a reason to take E as your end and your  $\varphi$ -ing is a necessary means to bringing E about, then you have a reason to  $\varphi$ . As such, it should be relatively uncontroversial, as uncontroversial as the principle of means-end rationality, which has seemed to most philosophers to be the least controversial of all principles of practical reason. Admittedly, philosophers have questioned the principle of means-end rationality when taken to be a substantive requirement of practical reason as opposed to a mere principle of relative rationality. As a substantive requirement, the principle of means-end rationality holds that we always have reason to take the most efficient means to our *given* ends. And some philosophers have rightly questioned, "How can the fact that something is a means to an end give us a reason to take that means if the end is not itself something that we have reason to pursue?"<sup>27</sup> But in defense of TCR-1, I did not appeal to this controversial substantive requirement, but only to the relatively uncontroversial principle of relative rationality.

4.2 *In defense of TCR-2:* According to TCR-2, if S has more reason to perform  $a_i$  than to perform  $a_j$ , then S has more reason to desire that  $o_i$  obtains than to desire that  $o_j$  obtains. We should accept TCR-2, I will argue, in light of the plausibility of the following two claims:

**IN**    *The Irreducible Normativity of Practical Reasons:* Practical reasons are irreducibly normative. Any purely reductive account of practical reasons will be unable to capture the normativity of practical reasons.

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<sup>26</sup> For more on this point, see Portmore (2007, 50-53).

<sup>27</sup> See, for instance, Korsgaard (1997) and Quinn (1993).

**ME** *The Motivational Efficacy of Practical Reasons:* An agent's normative reason for performing  $a_i$  must be capable of becoming her motivating reason for performing  $a_i$ . More specifically, if S has most reason to perform  $a_i$ , knows all the relevant facts, and is fully rational, then S's reasons for performing  $a_i$  will themselves be sufficient to move her to perform  $a_i$ . And if S has more reason to perform  $a_i$  than to perform  $a_j$ , knows all the relevant facts, and is fully rational, then these reasons will themselves be sufficient to move her to perform  $a_i$  rather than  $a_j$  when faced with the choice of performing one or the other.<sup>28</sup>

Let us consider ME first. Note that ME is a fairly weak claim. It does not presuppose the Humean theory of motivation, according to which no belief could motivate us unless combined with some *independent desire*, that is, a desire that is not itself the product of that belief (Parfit 1997, 105). As far as ME goes, it may be, for instance, that the belief that some end is worth pursuing can itself produce a desire for that end. Nor does ME presuppose internalism about reasons, according to which S has a reason to perform  $a_i$  only if S would necessarily be motivated to perform  $a_i$  were she to deliberate on the relevant facts in a procedurally rational way (Parfit 1997, 108). ME differs from internalism about reasons in allowing that it may not be enough for an agent to merely deliberate properly to ensure that she will be motivated to do what she has a normative reason to do; she may also need to desire what she has reason to desire. Thus, on ME, judgments about reasons for action are capable of motivating fully rational agents to act, but, to be fully rational, it may not be enough to simply follow some deliberative procedure in reflecting upon one's given beliefs and desires; one may also need to start the process with the desires and beliefs that one has reason to have—that is, one may also need to be substantively rational. Compared to internalism about reasons, then, ME takes the connection between (normative) reasons for action and motivation to be possibly more tenuous. How tenuous the connection will be depends on whether we take being fully rational to be merely a procedural matter (as internalists about reasons do) or also a substantive matter of having certain desires and beliefs (as externalists about reasons do). Yet whether we are internalists or

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<sup>28</sup> This is very close to what Christine Korsgaard call the "internalism requirement"—see Korsgaard (1986, 297). And this something that rational intuitionists, Kantian internalists, and Humean internalists can all agree on. See Darwall (2006, 298).

externalists about reasons, it seems that we must, as ME does, preserve some necessary connection between reasons for action and motivation, for if some putative reason is not something that could motivate an agent even when she is fully rational, then it is hard to see in what sense it would be a reason for *her* at all.

We should also, I believe, accept IN. Recently, a number of leading philosophers (e.g., Parfit and Scanlon) have argued for IN. Below, I will try to briefly sketch some of these arguments. One of the main reasons they give for accepting IN is the systematic failure of reductive accounts of ‘a reason for S to perform  $a_i$ ’ (Scanlon 1998, 57). Such accounts fall victim to the open question argument, for questions such as, “Act  $a_i$  is N (some non-normative property), but do I have a reason to perform  $a_i$ ?” always have an open feel to them. The reason seems to be that judging that the fact that  $a_i$  is N provides me with a reason to perform  $a_i$  entails drawing a normative conclusion that is not drawn if I judge merely that  $a_i$  is N. The normative claim that the fact that  $a_i$  is N is a reason to perform  $a_i$  seems to be a non-trivial addition to the non-normative claim that  $a_i$  is N. Non-normative facts may provide the grounds for reaching such normative conclusions, but judging that these facts obtain need not involve explicitly drawing these normative conclusions (Stratton-Lake and Hooker 2006, 151). So even if some non-normative facts are often or even necessarily practically relevant, the fact that such non-normative facts are practically relevant is still a further fact about them: a normative fact (Dancy 2006, 137). And this normative fact is not identical to the non-normative fact on which it is based.

Of course, the sorts of considerations cited above may seem to rule out only the possibility of analytic reduction. On the prospects for non-analytic reduction, we would do well to consider the words of Derek Parfit:

Reductive views can be both non-analytical and true when, and because, the relevant concepts leave open certain possibilities, between which we must choose on non-conceptual grounds. But many other possibilities are conceptually excluded. Thus it was conceptually possible that heat should turn out to be molecular kinetic energy. But heat could not have turned out to be a shade of blue, or a medieval king. (1997, 122)

And just as heat could not turn out to be a certain shade of blue, it seems that a truth about what there is reason to do could not turn out to be a certain kind of purely naturalistic truth. Given the depth of difference between these two types of truths, a non-analytic reduction of one to the other is conceptually excluded. Here, an analogy might be helpful, but, as

Parfit explains, it is hard to come by a close analogy for the irreducibility of normative facts to naturalistic facts. Here is Parfit:

Since normative facts are in their own distinctive category, there is no close analogy for their irreducibility to natural facts. One comparison would be with proposed reductions of necessary truths—such as truths of logic and mathematics—to certain kinds of contingent truths. Given the depth of the difference between these kinds of truth, we can be confident, I assume, that such reductions fail. There is a similar difference, I believe, between normative and natural truths. (Parfit 1997, 122)

The thought is, then, that the difference between normative facts and naturalistic facts is as substantial as that between the truths of mathematics and contingent truths, and, thus, substantial enough that we can be confident that all reductions (analytic or non-analytic) of the normative to the natural will fail. Moreover, it seems that the difference between normative facts and naturalistic facts is no more substantial than the difference between normative facts and other non-normative facts, such as facts about the supernatural. So we further conclude that all reductions (analytic or non-analytic) of the normative to the non-normative fail. When we attempt to identify normative facts with non-normative facts of any sort (natural or supernatural), we change the subject matter and thus abolish their normativity. The fact that  $a_i$  is N does not have the same subject matter as the fact that there are reasons to perform acts that are N. The latter fact is a normative fact about the former (Dancy 2006, 140). There is, then, a strong presumptive case to be made in favor of the view that any adequate account of practical reasons will need to take IN into account.

Now, to do justice to both the motivational efficacy and irreducible normativity of practical reasons, it seems that we will need to provide an account of reasons for action in terms of reasons for possessing some motivational state. Of course, not just any motivational state will do, as some motivational states are not sensitive to our judgments about reasons. Mere urges, for instance, are motivational, but they are not judgment-sensitive, that is, they are not sensitive to our judgments about reasons (Scanlon 1998, 20). Desires, by contrast, are judgment-sensitive. Contrary to Hume, many philosophers now think that reason is the master of, not a slave to, desires (see, e.g., Scanlon 1998, chapter 1). If this is right, motivation can be the consequence of recognizing reasons to desire (Brink 2008). All this leads me to conclude that the best account of reasons for action will be in terms of reasons for desiring. I see no other way of doing

justice to both ME and IN. Other potential accounts of practical reasons seem to run afoul of ME, IN, or both.

To illustrate, consider the following schema:

S has a reason to intend to perform  $a_i$  if and only if  $a_i$  is F.

If, on the one hand, we take F to be something normative but not intrinsically motivating, such as “an action that S has sufficient reason to believe is utility maximizing,” then we will ensure IN but only at the cost of forsaking ME, for it seems that the judgment that one has sufficient reason to believe that  $a_i$  is utility maximizing is not the sort of judgment that, by itself, is sufficient to motivate the judger to perform  $a_i$  even when both fully informed and fully rational. Even those who think that some beliefs are *intrinsically motivating* (i.e., capable of motivating even absent some independent desire) do not think that this sort of belief is intrinsically motivating. The sorts of beliefs that are typically held to be intrinsically motivating are normative beliefs—for instance, the belief that  $a_i$  is what one has most reason to do, not the belief that  $a_i$  is utility maximizing. Moreover, it is only a subset of normative beliefs that could possibly motivate S to perform  $a_i$  absent some independent desire: normative beliefs about  $a_i$  and its consequences, not normative beliefs about beliefs about  $a_i$ . Thus, normative beliefs, such as, “ $a_i$  is morally required,” “ $a_i$  is what there is most reason to do,” and “ $a_i$  has an outcome that there is sufficient reason to desire,” are all, perhaps, intrinsically motivating. But it is clear that the normative belief “there are reasons to believe that  $a_i$  is utility maximizing” could motivate only when conjoined with some independent desire, e.g., the desire either to maximize utility or to do what there is sufficient reason to believe is utility maximizing. Thus if F is something normative but not intrinsically motivating, then ME will not hold—that is, it will not be the case that S, even if fully informed and fully rational, will be moved by F *alone* to do  $a_i$  (i.e., without some independent desire needing to be present).

If, on the other hand, we take F to be something non-normative but intrinsically motivating, such as “an action that will fulfill at least one of S’s present desires,” then we will have to forsake IN, for the fact that doing  $a_i$  will fulfill one’s present desires is non-normative. Moreover, the fact that performing  $a_i$  will fulfill one’s present desires is not even a fact of normative significance, since such facts do not, as Parfit has argued,

provide one with any reason to perform  $a_i$ .<sup>29</sup> To ensure that both ME and IN are met, then, we should accept TCR-2, where reasons for action are accounted for in terms of reasons for desiring.

Admittedly, I have, in this section, relied on a number of contentious metaethical claims, and I have had the space here only to briefly sketch some arguments in support of these claims. But this falls well short of providing a full defense of such claims. At best, then, the case presented here is only a presumptive case in favor of TCR-2. Nevertheless, it is important to note that these claims have been defended more extensively elsewhere (Scanlon 1998 and Parfit 1997) and by at least one of the leading critics of TCR (i.e., Scanlon). So this presumptive case should have persuasive force against even some of TCR's leading critics.<sup>30</sup>

*4.3 In defense of TCR-3:* As noted above, the teleologist is committed not only to the bi-conditional relationship between reasons for acting and reasons for desiring entailed by the conjunction of TCR-1 and TCR-2, but also to the view that reasons for desiring are explanatorily prior to reasons for acting. And, thus, the teleologist must defend TCR-3: if S has more reason to perform  $a_i$  than to perform  $a_j$ , then this is so in virtue of the fact that S has more reason to desire that  $o_i$  obtains than to desire that  $o_j$  obtains.

In defense of TCR-3, I will argue that it is more plausible than all of its alternatives. The first alternative is to hold that what explains the bi-conditional relationship between reasons for acting and reasons for desiring is not TCR-3, but some common "cause" — actually, not a cause at all, but rather something that explains both reasons for acting and reasons for desiring, and consequently the correlation between the two. To illustrate, let 'P' stand for 'S has more reason to *perform*  $a_i$  than to *perform*  $a_j$ ' and let 'D' stand for 'S has more reason to *desire* that  $o_i$  obtains than to *desire* that  $o_j$  obtains'. Recall that one way to explain the fact that P if and only if D is to hold that P and D have a common "cause": that is, both 'P, because B' and 'D, because B' — where, for instance, 'B' might stand for ' $o_i$  is *better* than  $o_j$ '.

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<sup>29</sup> See Parfit (2008) for an extended discussion of why such desire-based theories of practical reasons fail. For more on the distinction between a normative fact (a fact about reasons) and a fact of normative significance (a non-normative fact that provides reasons), see Dancy (2006).

<sup>30</sup> Although I've relied on IN in arguing for TCR, it should be noted that TCR is compatible with the denial of IN. TCR is, for instance, perfectly compatible with ethical naturalism, for one could give a reductive naturalistic account of reasons for desiring.



It is important to note that the common-“cause” explanation in terms of B must not be mediated by an explanation of P in terms of D, for consider that one can accept TCR-3 while accepting both ‘P, because B’ and ‘D, because B’ if what explains the former is that both ‘P, because D’ and ‘D, because B’. In that case, the teleologist could account for P in terms of B, but the explanation would be mediated by an explanation of P in terms of D. The thought would be that the fact that  $o_i$  is *better* than  $o_j$  does not in and of itself explain why S has more reason to *perform*  $a_i$  than to *perform*  $a_j$ . Rather, it explains why S has more reason to *desire* that  $o_i$  obtains than to *desire* that  $o_j$  obtains, which in turn explains why S has more reason to *perform*  $a_i$  than to *perform*  $a_j$ .

One reason to reject this common-“cause” explanation is simply that the most plausible candidate for the common “cause” is ‘ $o_i$  is *better* than  $o_j$ ’, but that, in that case, we should think that the explanation is mediated. If the fact that  $o_i$  is *better* than  $o_j$  didn’t give S more reason to *desire* that  $o_i$  obtains than to *desire* that  $o_j$  obtains, then I don’t see how it could give S more reason to *perform*  $a_i$  than to *perform*  $a_j$ . The point, here, is the same as the one about the implausibility of taking means-end rationality to be a substantive requirement of practical reason. Absent some reason to desire that  $o_i$  obtains, how could there be any reason to take the necessary means to ensuring that  $o_i$  obtains: performing  $a_i$ .

In any case, though, I think that we should reject the common-“cause” explanation, because we should reject its initial assumption: that B explains D rather than its being the other way around, where ‘B’ stands for ‘ $o_i$  is *better* than  $o_j$ ’. Increasingly, philosophers have come to think that D explains B, for to say that  $o_i$ ’s obtaining would be good is just to say that  $o_i$  has the purely formal, higher-order property of having other properties that provide the right kind of reasons for desiring that  $o_i$  obtains.<sup>31</sup> So, if this is right, the common-“cause” explanation in terms of ‘ $o_i$  is *better* than  $o_j$ ’ is a nonstarter. And if ‘ $o_i$  is *better* than  $o_j$ ’ is the only plausible candidate for a common “cause” that might explain the correlation between P and D, as seems to be the case, then we should reject this common-“cause” alternative to TCR-3. Of course, these might seem like two big ifs. So, again, the argument here is only presumptive. Given the prima facie plausibility of these antecedents, there is a presumptive case to be made against this alternative to TCR-3. And, importantly, we find, again, that the argument should have persuasive force against some of TCR’s leading

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<sup>31</sup> Again, this is called the buck-passing account of value—see, for instance, Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004), Scanlon (1998), and Stratton-Lake and Hooker (2006).

critics, for it seems that critics such as Scanlon accept my assumption that it is D that explains B, not *vice versa*.

The second alternative to TCR-3 is to hold that what explains the correlation between P and D is that P explains D, not that D explains P, as TCR-3 supposes. This is to hold that when I have more reason to desire that  $o_i$  obtains than to desire that  $o_j$  obtains, this is *always* because I have more reason to perform  $a_i$  than to perform  $a_j$ . But this is clearly false, as one simple example is sufficed to show. Take the case where  $a_i$  is the act of putting my money into savings account A, which yields 5% annually, and where  $a_j$  is the act of putting my money into savings account B, which yields 3% annually. Assume that both savings accounts are otherwise equal and that, other things being equal, I am better off putting my money in a higher-yielding savings account. In this case, it is clear that what explains the fact that I have more reason to perform  $a_i$  than to perform  $a_j$  is that I have more reason to desire that  $o_i$  obtains than to desire that  $o_j$  obtains. The same would seem to hold for any other prudential choice without moral ramifications, for no one would argue that the reason I have for preferring the world in which I am prudentially better off is that this is the world in which I did what was prudent (i.e., what I had more prudential reason to do).

This brings us to the third and last alternative to TCR-3, which is to claim that what explains the correlation between P and D is that, in some instances, P explains D and that, in other instances, D explains P, but that, in every instance, it is either one or the other. This is to suppose that *sometimes* when I have more reason to desire that  $o_i$  obtains than to desire that  $o_j$  obtains, this is because I have more reason to perform  $a_i$  than to perform  $a_j$ . One potential problem with this view is that it is dis-unified. And thus the proponent of this view owes us some explanation for why sometimes reasons for acting are explanatorily prior and other times reasons for desiring are explanatorily prior. This, of course, is more of a challenge than a refutation, but there are reasons to think that the challenge cannot be met, for it seems implausible to suppose that whether one has more reason to desire one end than to desire another could ever depend on whether one had more reason to perform the means to the one than to perform the means to the other. This just gets things backwards. Ends are normative for means, not *vice versa*. In other words, the reasons for adopting some end provide reasons for adopting the necessary means to that end, but the reasons for adopting the necessary means to some end do not provide any reason to adopt that end. How, then, could one's reason to

adopt some end depend on whether one has a reason to perform the means to bringing that end about?

One might look to Elizabeth Anderson's view (1993) for an answer. Her view does seem to be contrary to TCR-3, and, therefore, insofar as it is plausible, it may seem to provide a counterexample to TCR-3. On Anderson's view, an action is rational only if it adequately expresses one's rational evaluative attitudes (e.g., respect, consideration, and appreciation) toward persons, animals, and things, and it is rational to adopt the aim (or the end) of bringing about a certain state of affairs by performing a given act only if that act, which is the means to bringing about that aim/end, is itself rational. To illustrate, consider that, on Anderson's view, it is rational for me to act in ways that express my love for my wife. And it is because it is rational to do so that I have reason to aim to bring about the state of affairs where we spend time alone with each other. The ground, then, for pursuing this state of affairs is that in doing so I express my rational evaluative attitudes toward my wife (i.e., I express my love for my wife). Thus, it seems that, on Anderson's view, whether I have reason to adopt the state of affairs where we spend time alone together as my end depends on whether it is rational for me to act so as to adequately express my love for her. And so it seems that, in contrast to TCR-3, Anderson's view holds that reasons for acting are explanatorily prior to reasons for desiring, for on her view the rationality of desiring and then adopting some end depends on the rationality of performing some action.

But whether Anderson's view is indeed contrary to TCR-3 depends on whether the rationality of performing such actions depends, in turn, on the rationality of desiring and adopting some further end. The issue, then, is whether her injunction to act only in ways that express one's rational attitudes towards persons, animals, and things is distinct from an injunction to act so as to promote some state of affairs. If it is not, then Anderson's view is just a case where whether one has reason to adopt one end depends on whether one has a reason to adopt some further end to which the former is a means. Perhaps, pursuing the state of affairs where we spend time alone together is rational only because it is rational to pursue the state of affairs where my actions adequately express my rational evaluative attitudes toward persons. If this is right, then there is no conflict between Anderson's view and TCR-3.

Anderson has argued that her injunction, which she calls "E," to only act in ways that *express* one's rational attitudes toward persons is not equivalent to the injunction, which she calls "P," to act so as to *promote* the state of affairs where one's actions adequately express one's rational

attitudes. She argues that E is no more equivalent to P than the injunction, E', to only make logically valid inferences is equivalent to the injunction, P', to act so as to promote the state of affairs where one makes logically valid inferences. In both cases, the latter (P or P') tells one to do something that the former (E or E') does not: in the case of P, to perform more acts that adequately express one's rational attitudes toward persons and, in the case of P', to make more valid inferences. Moreover, unlike E, "P tells me to violate E, if by doing so I can bring about more events containing E than if I never violated E" (Anderson 1996, 544). Thus, unlike E, P tells me to betray my marriage partner by committing adultery if my doing so will create an opportunity for me to more fully express my love for her than I otherwise could have, as where this betrayal will enable a reconciliation that enables me to express my love for her more fully than before (Anderson 1996, 545). But these differences between E and P do not demonstrate that E is not equivalent to *some* injunction to promote a state of affairs; they only demonstrate that E is not equivalent to P.

So consider P\*: act so as to *promote* the state of affairs where as few of one's actions as possible fail to adequately express one's rational attitudes. Unlike P, P\* does not tell us to act so as to promote greater instances of acting in ways that express one's rational attitudes toward persons. And, like E, it functions as a constraint, telling us not to violate E (i.e., not to act in a way that fails to adequately express one's rational attitudes toward persons) even in order to bring about more events containing E (i.e., more events where one adequately expresses one's rational attitudes toward persons). Of course, P\* would tell us to violate E if doing so will minimize one's violations of E. But, as Sturgeon (1996, 521) has pointed out, it is hard to imagine any but the most fanciful of cases where violating E now will prevent me from committing more numerous, comparable violations of E in the future. Nor is it obvious that, in such fanciful cases, it is E rather than P\* that gets the more plausible result.<sup>32</sup> But rather than debate the issue of whether E or P\* is more plausible, it is clear that E is equivalent to P\*\*: act so as to *promote* the state of affairs where one's current actions do not fail to adequately express one's rational attitudes toward persons. P\*\* is equivalent to E, and so we see that Anderson's view that the rationality of desiring and adopting certain ends depends on the rationality of performing certain actions is not in conflict with TCR-3, for the rationality

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<sup>32</sup> For more on this issue, see Portmore (1998).

of performing these actions just depends on whether it is rational to adopt P\*\* as one's end.<sup>33</sup>

*4.4 In defense of TCR on the whole:* The arguments for TCR-2 and TCR-3 each relied on certain controversial metaethical assumptions about reasons and values, which I don't have space here to fully defend. But, again, it is worth noting that these controversial assumptions are ones that at least some of TCR's leading critics endorse. Of course, my aim is not just to convince some of TCR's critics, but to convince others as well, and yet not everyone will accept these assumptions. So let me explain why I think that even those who reject my metaethical assumptions have good reason to accept TCR. Compared to its alternatives, TCR does a far superior job of systematizing our various substantive convictions about what we have reason to do. Everyone seems to admit that, at least, in some instances our reasons for a given action derive from our reasons for desiring its outcome. The only point in contention is whether this is true in all instances. Some have thought not, for they have thought that there are certain substantive views about value and practical reasons that TCR cannot accommodate—e.g. the view that it is certain concrete entities, and not states of affairs, that are the primary bearers of intrinsic value and that, when playing to win a game of tennis, there are reasons not to take certain other considerations into account when deciding whether to make a certain strategic shot. But, as I've shown above, this is a misconception: there are no substantive views about values and reasons that TCR cannot accommodate. TCR is an extremely ecumenical view. Thus, one good reason to accept TCR, apart from whatever reasons there are to accept each of its three constitutive claims, is that TCR allows us to give a systematic account of our various substantive views about reasons for action.

## 5. Conclusion

Whenever we face the choice of how to act, we also face the choice of which of various possible worlds to actualize. It is through our actions that we affect the way the world goes. The teleological conception of practical reasons holds that our reasons for acting are a function of our reasons for preferring some of these possible worlds to others. On this view, if I ought to prefer the possible world that will be actualized by my performing  $a_i$  at  $t$

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<sup>33</sup> For any deontological injunction prohibiting agents from performing a certain type of action, there is, as I and others have argued, an equivalent consequentialist injunction requiring agents to bring about a certain state of affairs. See, for instance, Portmore (2007 and 2008) and Louise (2004).

to the possible world that will be actualized by my performing  $a_j$  at  $t$ , then, given the choice of performing either  $a_i$  or  $a_j$  at  $t$ , I ought to perform  $a_i$  at  $t$ .

I have defended this view against both putative counterexamples and many actual and potential misconceptions. I have shown that this conception of practical reasons is quite ecumenical, and so we do not have to give up any of our considered convictions about values or reasons to accept it. I have also offered positive arguments in favor of each of TCR's three claims, arguing, among other things, that we must accept TCR to do justice to both the irreducible normativity and motivational efficacy of practical reasons. Moreover, I have argued that TCR is, in contrast to its alternatives, superior in its ability to systematize our considered convictions about practical reasons.<sup>34</sup>

*Department of Philosophy  
Arizona State University  
P.O. Box 874102  
Tempe, AZ 85287-4102*

*douglas.portmore@asu.edu*

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