

Does rationality consist in responding correctly to reasons?

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1. Rationality and responding to reasons

Some philosophers think that rationality consists in responding correctly to reasons. For a reason I shall explain in section 2, not many philosophers accept this idea as it stands. But very many accept some variant of it. This paper looks for what truth it contains. I shall pursue the truth through many of the twists and turns the idea can take. I cannot go through every one; there are so many. But I hope nevertheless to extract all the truth contained in the idea.

Variants will come later. This section clarifies what the idea means in its original form. What does it mean to say that rationality consists in responding correctly to reasons? Partly, it is to say that:

Equivalence. Necessarily, you are rational if and only if you respond correctly to reasons. As I shall put it, rationality is equivalent to responding correctly to reasons. To say that rationality *consists in* responding correctly to reasons goes further. It implies that rationality can be reduced to responding correctly to reasons. Some philosophers hope to reduce rationality to reasons through this formula or some related one.¹ One purpose of this paper is to argue they cannot do so. Rationality must be recognized as an independent source of requirements.

For this purpose, it turns out that I need only concentrate on versions of equivalence, rather than on putative reductions. I shall argue that equivalence and its related formulae are false. *A fortiori*, it will follow that no reduction of this sort is possible.

Another purpose of the paper is simply to explore a part of the relation between rationality and reasons. I shall look for what truth there is in equivalence and its relatives. I shall give most attention to this one side of equivalence, because it is nearest to the truth:

Entailment. Necessarily, if you are rational you respond correctly to reasons. As I shall put it, rationality entails responding correctly to reasons.

Responding correctly to reasons

I need to start by elucidating the notion of ‘responding correctly to reasons’.

First, the reasons it refers to are normative reasons. Furthermore, they are reasons that are owned by you, as I put it. There may be a reason for you to be punished, but this reason does not call for a response from you. Your punishment is the responsibility of the authorities, not you. You do not own this reason. On the other hand, if there is a reason for you to get lunch, you probably own it. It calls for a response from you. So ‘reasons’ refers to your normative reasons – the normative reasons that are owned by you.

Next, what does ‘correctly’ mean? It is simply a placeholder. Equivalence claims there is *some* way of responding to reasons such that, necessarily, you are rational if and only if you respond to reasons that way. ‘Responding correctly’ means responding in that way, whatever it is. ‘Correctly’ cannot be omitted from the formulae, because there are ways of responding to reasons such that it would not be rational to respond in one of those ways. Those ways do not count as correct.

What way of responding to reasons is correct, then? How must you respond if you are to be rational? Suppose you have a reason to *F*; to be rational must you *F*? No. Suppose you also have a reason not to *F*, as you certainly may. If you had to *F* in order to respond correctly to a reason to *F*, to respond correctly to your two conflicting reasons, you would have both to *F* and not *F*.

You could not respond correctly to both reasons, therefore. But we must not interpret 'respond correctly' in a way that makes it impossible for you to respond correctly to conflicting reasons. If we did, equivalence would entail that you cannot be rational, since you inevitably encounter conflicting reasons. We cannot have that.

Let us go more carefully. Suppose you ought to F . I take it for granted that, if this is so, there is some explanation of why it is so. The explanation may be that the balance of reasons comes down on the side of F ing. In that case, you ought to F because on balance your reasons require you to F . More briefly: your reasons require you to F .

Possibly the explanation of why you ought to F is not given by the balance of reasons. Perhaps, say, some rigid deontic rule determines that you ought to F . Nevertheless, we count the explanation of why you ought to F as a reason for you to F . So in this case too, we may say your reasons require you to F . ('Your reasons' refers to one reason only.) Taking all cases together, we may conclude that you ought to F if and only if your reasons require you to F .

This allows us to say that, to respond correctly to reasons, you must F whenever your reasons require you to F . This interpretation of 'respond correctly to reasons' makes it possible for you to respond correctly when your reasons conflict. We could express the same interpretation in a different but equivalent way. Your reasons require you to F if and only if you ought to F . So we could say that, to respond correctly to reasons, you must F whenever you ought to F .

That you F whenever your reasons require you to F is a necessary condition for you to respond correctly to reasons. There is at least one other necessary condition as well. Even if you F whenever your reasons require you to F , you might not be responding correctly to reasons; it might just be a coincidence. Some appropriate connection must hold between your reasons and your F ing. It may need to be an explanatory one. Alternatively, a mere counterfactual connection may be enough. For instance, the necessary condition might be that you would not have F ed had your reasons required you not to F .

I shall add a clause to my formulae requiring an appropriate explanatory or counterfactual connection. But since it does not matter for my argument, I shall not try to say just what sort of connection would be appropriate.

Perhaps more conditions are necessary. But I am going to assume we have now arrived at necessary and sufficient conditions for you to respond correctly to reasons. You respond correctly to reasons if and only if, whenever your reasons require you to F , you F and there is an appropriate explanatory or counterfactual connection between your reasons and your F ing. This is an analysis of 'you respond correctly to reasons'.

It makes equivalence come down to:

Equivalence analysed. Necessarily, you are rational if and only if, whenever your reasons require you to F , you F and an appropriate explanatory or counterfactual connection holds between your reasons and your F ing.

One side of it is:

Entailment analysed. Necessarily, if you are rational then, whenever your reasons require you to F , you F and an appropriate explanatory or counterfactual connection holds between your reasons and your F ing.

Since I am not interested in the explanatory or counterfactual connection, I shall generally concentrate on this central part of entailment:

Core condition. Necessarily, if you are rational then, if your reasons require you to F , you F .

This schema is supposed to hold for all substitutions of a verb phrase for ' F '. We can therefore

insert a universal quantifier into the core condition when we choose. We get: necessarily, if you are rational, you F whenever your reasons require you to F .

I now turn to evaluating equivalence.

2. The quick objection

I shall start with a quick objection to it. Suppose your reasons require you to F but you are ignorant of those reasons. Suppose you are not at fault in being ignorant; you have no evidence of the reasons. If you do not F , you might nevertheless be rational. So the core condition is false. Therefore, equivalence is false because it entails the core condition. So far as your rationality is concerned, ignorance of your reasons constitutes an excuse for not F ing.

Here is an example. The fish on the plate in front of you contains salmonella. This is a reason for you not to eat it, and let us assume all your reasons together require you not to eat it. But you have no evidence that the fish contains salmonella. Then you might eat it even though your reasons require you not to, and nevertheless you might be rational.

In this example, you are ignorant of the non-normative fact that the fish contains salmonella, which constitutes a reason for you not to eat it. In another version of the example, you believe the fish contains salmonella, but, without fault, you do not believe this constitutes a reason for you not to eat it. Here you are ignorant of a normative fact. Either sort of ignorance is an excuse for not responding correctly to reasons.

Why is ignorance an excuse? Because of a fundamental feature of rationality: that your rationality depends only on the properties of your mind.² 'Rationality supervenes on the mind', I shall say. If your mind in one situation has the same properties as it has in another, then you are rational in one if and only if you are rational in the other. This is a conceptual truth; it is part of the concept of rationality. True, we sometimes say that a non-mental act of yours is irrational. If you believe your reasons require you not to eat the fish, and yet you eat it, we might say your act is irrational. But that is because we normally assume that you do a particular act only if you intend to do it. You are indeed irrational if you believe your reasons require you not to eat the fish and yet you intend to eat it – this is a consequence of the enkratic condition, which I shall come to in section 4. Given our normal assumption, you are therefore irrational if you believe your reasons require you not to eat the fish and yet you eat it. Your act shows you are irrational, so we treat the act itself as irrational. But in this case too, whether or not you are irrational depends only on the state of your mind. If we learn that our normal assumption is false, and you eat the fish without intending to – perhaps you eat it accidentally because it is concealed under some mashed potato – we shall not think you irrational.

Go back now to the case where the fish contains salmonella but you do not believe it does, and you eat it. Compare it with the case where the fish does not contain salmonella and you do not believe it does and you eat it. The properties of your mind might be the same in either case. (An externalist about the mind can recognize this possibility as well as an internalist.³) Clearly you could be rational in the second case. Therefore, because rationality supervenes on the mind, you could be rational in the first case too. So your ignorance is an excuse in that case. A parallel argument shows that ignorance of a normative fact can also be an excuse.

The quick objection is that ignorance is an excuse. Many philosophers find it convincing. As a result, few accept exactly equivalence. Instead, they assume that a rational person's response to reasons has to be filtered through her beliefs in some way. They think rationality is equivalent to responding correctly to beliefs about reasons, or to believed reasons, or something of that sort. I shall come to thoughts like this in section 4.

3. Attitudinal reasons

Before that I need to investigate a possible reply to the quick objection. It can be argued that your ignorance of a reason does not always excuse you. Some reasons may impose *strict liability* on you, as I shall put it. By this I mean that, necessarily, if you are rational you respond correctly to these reasons, whether or not you believe they exist, and whether or not you believe they are reasons. If you do not respond correctly to them you are automatically irrational. (By ‘irrational’ I mean not rational.)

How could a reason impose strict liability, in view of the supervenience of rationality on the mind? I argued on grounds of supervenience that a reason cannot impose strict liability, using the example of salmonella. But my argument would not work against a reason that is itself a state of mind or a fact about a state of mind. And, at least at first sight, there seem to be reasons of this sort.

For instance, here are some claims about reasons that are plausible at first sight:

Attitudinal reasons

R1. If you believe p , your belief is a reason for you not to believe not p .

R2. If you intend to F , your intention is a reason for you not to intend not to F .

R3. If you believe p and you believe that if p then q , your two beliefs are together a reason for you to believe q .

R4. If you intend to F and you believe you cannot F unless you G , your intention and belief are together a reason for you to intend to G .

In each of these claims, the reason is said to be an attitude of yours or a combination of attitudes. But we might equally well take the reason to be the fact that you have the attitude or combination of attitudes. It is a harmless regimentation to count every reason as a fact. Either way, I shall call these reasons (if they are indeed reasons) ‘attitudinal reasons’.

Although these claims are plausible at first sight, I do not believe attitudes or combinations of attitudes can be reasons in this way. Here is why. Take *R3* as an example. For ‘ p ’ substitute ‘Emissions of carbon dioxide do not cause global warming’ and for ‘ q ’ ‘Emissions of carbon dioxide are harmless’. There are various pieces of evidence for the proposition that emissions of carbon dioxide are harmless, and other pieces of evidence against it. No doubt these pieces of evidence constitute reasons for or against believing the proposition. But now suppose you believe that emissions of carbon dioxide do not cause global warming, and you also believe that, if emissions of carbon dioxide do not cause global warming, they are harmless. According to *R3*, these beliefs of yours are a reason to believe that emissions of carbon dioxide are harmless. But that is not credible. Your beliefs could not stand as a further reason for believing emissions of carbon dioxide are harmless, alongside the evidence. You cannot by means of your beliefs bootstrap a new reason into existence, to add to the evidence.

I can reinforce the example. *R3* entails that, if you believe p and you believe that if p then p , these beliefs constitute a reason for you to believe p . That cannot be so. We can take it for granted that you believe the tautology that, if p then p . Given that, *R3* entails that believing a proposition gives you a reason to believe it. Any belief you have gives you a reason to have it. That cannot be so; it would be absurd bootstrapping.⁴

Similar bootstrapping arguments will work against the other putative attitudinal reasons. However, the conclusion that there are no attitudinal reasons is controversial, and I do not wish to rest the main argument of this section on it. So, for the sake of argument in this section, I shall suppose that attitudinal reasons do exist. I shall show that, even if they do, they do not constitute a basis for equivalence.

Each attitudinal reason is matched by a corresponding necessary condition for rationality:

Conditions of rationality

C1. Necessarily, if you are rational, you do not believe p and believe not p .

C2. Necessarily, if you are rational, you do not intend to F and intend not to F .

C3. Necessarily, if you are rational then, if you believe p and you believe that if p then q , you believe q .

C4. Necessarily, if you are rational then, if you intend to F and you believe you cannot F unless you G , you intend to G .

I have stated these conditions only approximately. For example, you might be rational even if you do not believe everything that follows by modus ponens from what you believe.⁵ But I shall not burden you with the more complicated, accurate formulations, nor the corresponding accurate formulations of attitudinal reasons. Since they are only illustrative examples, rough formulations are good enough in this paper. I hope it is obvious that there are necessary conditions for rationality of this sort.

If attitudinal reasons exist, they impose strict liability just because of their correspondence with conditions of rationality. If you have an attitudinal reason to F but do not F , you fail to satisfy the corresponding condition of rationality, so you are not rational. You have contradictory intentions or contradictory beliefs, or you do not believe what follows by modus ponens from the contents of your beliefs, or you are irrational in some other way. That is so whether or not you believe you have a reason to F .

Ignorance is no excuse

If there are indeed attitudinal reasons, they impose strict liability. They do so without violating the supervenience of rationality on the mind, because they are states of mind themselves. But you might still be uneasy, and feel that ignorance of a reason must be an excuse. However, we can see from the nature of attitudinal reasons themselves how they can impose strict liability. You can respond to an attitudinal reason without believing it exists or, if you do believe it exists, without believing it is a reason. Given that you can do so, neither the fact that you do not believe it exists nor the fact that you do not believe it is a reason constitutes an excuse for not responding to it.

How can you respond to an attitudinal reason without believing it exists? You often respond to an attitude without believing it exists. You may respond to a belief of yours that it is raining by putting up your umbrella. To do so, you do not need to have a second-order belief that you believe it is raining; you do not need to believe the attitude exists.

I am not suggesting your attitude in that case constitutes a reason. But here is an example of responding to an attitude that (I am assuming in this section) does constitute a reason. Suppose you believe it is raining, but then you look out of the window and see the rain has stopped. You now believe it is not raining. We are assuming this belief constitutes a reason for you not to believe it is raining. Typically, you will indeed no longer believe it is raining once you acquire the opposite belief. Some unconscious process generally ensures that, when you come to believe a proposition, you do not also believe its negation. The operation of this unconscious process counts as responding to your reason, which is your belief that it is not raining. For the process to work, you do not have to believe the reason exists. In this case, you do not have to believe you believe it is not raining.

You may respond to any attitudinal reason like this, through automatic processes. But sometimes your automatic processes let you down; you do not respond automatically. Even then,

you may respond nonetheless, through a conscious process of reasoning. Suppose, as you wake up one morning on a cruise, you hear gulls from your cabin, so you believe there are gulls about. Suppose you also have a standing belief that, if there are gulls about, land is nearby. According to my example *R3* of an attitudinal reason, these beliefs constitute a reason for you to believe land is nearby. But if they have not come together in your mind, you may not yet believe land is nearby. However, by a piece of conscious reasoning, you can reason your way to believing there is land nearby. This reasoning will involve calling to mind the proposition that there are gulls about, and the proposition that, if there are gulls about, land is nearby. But it need not involve any second-order belief that you believe these propositions.

At least, my own view about reasoning is that it need not involve second-order beliefs. Others disagree: they think reasoning must indeed involve second-order beliefs, at least if it is to be full-blown, critical reasoning.⁶ It does not matter in any case. The question is whether you can respond to an attitudinal reason without believing it exists, and the answer is that you can. You can respond by automatic processes. It is also at least arguable that you can respond by conscious reasoning – even if not the full-blown, critical sort – without believing the reason exists. We can add that, *a fortiori*, if you do believe an attitudinal reason exists, you can respond to it without believing it is a reason.

All this shows how attitudinal reasons may impose strict liability. For them, ignorance is no excuse.

Responding correctly to attitudinal reasons

Attitudinal reasons provide a reply to the quick objection. They are not subject to this objection, since they may impose strict liability. So if attitudinal reasons exist, they might provide support for equivalence.

They could not support equivalence exactly. Even if attitudinal reasons exist, they are not all the reasons there are. I take it for granted that many reasons are not attitudes. If the fish contains salmonella, that is a reason not to eat it, but it is not an attitude. The quick objection applies to these other reasons. Consequently, the core condition set out in section 1 is not true in general; you may be rational even if you sometimes do not *F* when your reasons require you to *F*.

Nevertheless, the core condition might be true if it was restricted to attitudinal reasons only:

Necessarily, if you are rational, you *F* if your attitudinal reasons require you to *F*.

Equivalence might be true if it was restricted in the same way:

Necessarily, you are rational if and only if you respond correctly to attitudinal reasons.

That is to say, rationality is equivalent to responding correctly to attitudinal reasons.

It might even be true that rationality *consists in* responding correctly to attitudinal reasons. That is to say, rationality might be reducible to responding correctly to attitudinal reasons. You might think that could not be true because we already need to know what rationality is before we can identify attitudinal reasons. I explained that each attitudinal reason corresponds to a condition of rationality. You might think we can identify attitudinal reasons only through their corresponding conditions of rationality. But even if that is so, it might nevertheless be the case that the conditions of rationality hold only because of their corresponding attitudinal reasons. There might simply be a class of attitudinal reasons like the ones I described, and rationality might consist in responding correctly to them. The reasons might explain the conditions, even though we identify the reasons through the conditions.

So attitudinal reasons provide a potential defence of equivalence and the reductionist idea that rationality consists in responding correctly to reasons. However, I shall now argue that this

defence fails. Even restricted to attitudinal reasons, equivalence is false.

Your attitudinal reasons may conflict with each other; you may have an attitudinal reason to *F* and an attitudinal reason not to *F*. I shall give an example soon. When your reasons conflict, you respond correctly to them so long as you do not go against their balance. Inevitably, even if you respond correctly, you will not satisfy one or other of your conflicting reasons. But I explained that these reasons impose strict liability. That is to say, in failing to satisfy one of them you are inevitably irrational. So, although you respond correctly to reasons, you are irrational. Therefore rationality is not equivalent to responding correctly to attitudinal reasons.

Here is the argument more briefly. To be rational, you have to satisfy some particular conditions. But attitudinal reasons can be overridden, so responding correctly to them cannot guarantee that you satisfy any particular condition. Therefore rationality is not equivalent to responding correctly to attitudinal reasons.

Next an example. Suppose you intend to *G*, and you believe you cannot *G* unless you *H*. According to *R4* among the examples above, this intention and belief together constitute an attitudinal reason for you to intend to *H*. But suppose also that you intend not to *H*. According to *R2*, this intention constitutes an attitudinal reason for you not to intend to *H*. So you have an attitudinal reason to intend to *H* and another not to intend to *H*.

To respond correctly to your reasons in this case, you must go with the balance of your reasons. Let us say that the balance is in favour of your not intending to *H*. Then you respond correctly to your reasons if you do not intend to *H*. But you intend to *G* and you believe you cannot *G* unless you *H*. Given that, the condition of rationality *C4* set out above tells us you are not rational. So you respond correctly to your reasons but you are not rational. Therefore, rationality is not equivalent to responding correctly to reasons.

There is a lacuna in this argument. It shows that you can respond correctly to your attitudinal reasons to *F* and not to *F* and yet be irrational. But the conclusion we need, to reject equivalence, is that you can respond correctly to *all* your attitudinal reasons and yet be irrational. Implicitly I assumed you are responding correctly to all your other attitudinal reasons, but that might be impossible. The argument requires two attitudinal reasons to conflict, which the example shows is possible. But suppose there cannot be a conflict between two of your attitudinal reasons unless you fail to respond correctly to some other attitudinal reason. Then, even if you respond correctly to the two particular conflicting reasons, you do not respond correctly to all your reasons.

So a reply to my argument is to claim that your attitudinal reasons are linked together in such a way that there cannot be a conflict between any two of them unless you fail to respond correctly to some other one. Call this 'the network theory'.

Is it true? I think not. So far as I can see, every one of your attitudinal reasons might be opposed by another. Then, when you respond correctly to all your attitudinal reasons, you will inevitably fail to satisfy some of them. Because each one imposes strict liability, that means you are irrational.

I can illustrate with the example. The two attitudinal reasons I mentioned conflict. According to the network theory, therefore, you must have some other attitudinal reason that you do not respond correctly to – one that I have not yet mentioned. An obvious candidate is this: your intention to *G* and your belief that you cannot *G* unless you *H* might together constitute a reason for you not to intend not to *H*. Since you do intend not to *H*, you are apparently not responding correctly to this reason.

But actually you may be responding correctly. This reason not to intend not to *H* may be

opposed by another attitudinal reason. For instance, suppose you believe you ought not to H , and this belief constitutes a reason for you to intend not to H . Then the balance of reasons might favour your intending not to H , so you are responding correctly to these reasons too.

According to the network theory, then, there must be yet another attitudinal reason that you are not responding correctly to. Perhaps it is this: your belief that you ought not to H and your belief that you cannot G unless you H might together constitute a reason for you not to intend to G . Since you do intend to G , you are apparently not responding correctly to this reason.

But again, actually you may be responding correctly. This reason not to intend to G may be opposed by another attitudinal reason. Perhaps it is opposed by a belief that you ought to G . So far as I can see, this could go on for ever.

I conclude that attitudinal reasons do not provide a successful defence of equivalence. Entailment, restricted to attitudinal reasons, may yet be true:

Necessarily, if you are rational you respond correctly to attitudinal reasons. This seems plausible to me,⁷ if attitudinal reasons exist. But since I believe attitudinal reasons do not exist, and since I have achieved my main aim of rejecting equivalence, I shall not pursue it further. From here on I set attitudinal reasons aside.

4. The enkratic condition

Many philosophers accept the quick objection – evidently they are not impressed by attitudinal reasons. It leads them to abandon equivalence. They do not think that rationality is equivalent to responding correctly to reasons. Instead they adopt some modified idea in which your reasons are filtered through your beliefs. They may think that, necessarily, you are rational if and only if you respond correctly to beliefs about reasons, or to believed reasons, or something of that sort. Can we find a modified idea that is true?

In this section and the next two I shall investigate in turn three alternative modifications. Each can be understood to claim that:

Modified entailment. Necessarily, if you are rational, you respond correctly to beliefs about reasons.

That is to say, rationality entails responding correctly to beliefs about reasons. Each alternative modification interprets the expression ‘respond correctly to beliefs about reasons’ differently. I shall accept modified entailment under some interpretations. One of the modifications is also intended to support:

Modified equivalence. Necessarily, you are rational if and only if you respond correctly to beliefs about reasons.

But I shall not accept modified equivalence under any interpretation.

The first modification starts with the core condition from section 1. An easy modification of it takes us to:

Direct enkratic condition. Necessarily, if you are rational then, if you believe your reasons require you to F , you F .

This cannot be generally true, for the following reason. Suppose you believe your reasons require you to F , and you intend to F , but you are prevented from F ing by something outside your mind. You may be rational. For instance, suppose you believe your reasons require you to vote for Gore, and you intend to do so, and you do all the appropriate things, but surprisingly the machinery works in such a way that you vote for Bush. You fail to do what you believe your reasons require you to do, but you might nevertheless be rational.

This is another application of the principle that rationality supervenes on the mind, which I

introduced in section 2. If the machinery had worked differently but your mind had been just the same, you would have voted for Gore. In that case, we may presume you would have been rational, since voting for Gore is what you believe your reasons require you to do. Given the way the machinery actually works, you vote for Bush. But the operation of the machinery cannot affect your rationality. Since your mind is the same in either case, you are rational in this case too.

The consequence is that the direct enkratic condition cannot be true unless whether or not you F is entirely determined by the properties of your mind. The condition cannot be true if F ing is a bodily act, or a state such as living in Australia.

It might nevertheless be true in important cases. I shall come back to those in section 5. But for cases where your F ing is not determined by the properties of your mind, we need to modify the core condition some more. We can make it:

Enkratic condition. Necessarily, if you are rational then, if you believe your reasons require you to F , you intend to F .

This condition encounters no objection from the supervenience of rationality on the mind. True, when you believe your reasons require you to F , some external force may prevent you from intending to F , just as an external force may prevent you from F ing. For instance, a psychologist might have wired your brain so as to prevent you from intending to F . But then the external force has affected your rationality; the scientist prevents you from being entirely rational. So this is not an objection to the enkratic condition.

The enkratic condition says that akrasia is irrational. This is a common opinion, and one I shall accept without more ado. I treat this as a concession, since I am about to show that it gives the best support I can find to modified entailment. I do not think the condition as I have stated it is exactly true. A more accurate version is:

Necessarily, if you are rational then, if you believe your reasons require you to F , and you believe you will F if and only if you intend to F , you intend to F .

But for the purposes of this paper, I shall stick to the simplified version I started with.

As a further concession, I am happy to strengthen the enkratic condition by adding an explanatory or counterfactual clause. We get (also adding a universal quantifier):

Strengthened enkratic condition. Necessarily, if you are rational then, whenever you believe your reasons require you to F , you intend to F and an appropriate explanatory or counterfactual connection holds between your belief that your reasons require you to F and your intending to F .

This condition constitutes an interpretation of modified entailment. We have only to interpret ‘you respond correctly to beliefs about reasons’ to mean that, whenever you believe your reasons require you to F , you intend to F and an appropriate explanatory or counterfactual connection holds between your belief that your reasons require you to F and your intending to F .

In this paper, I am looking for the truth in the idea that rationality consists in responding correctly to reasons. I have found that one part of it, or more accurately a modification of one part of it, is true. Specifically, I have found a way to interpret modified entailment that makes it true. Rationality entails responding correctly to beliefs about reasons.

But that is as far as I can go. Rationality is not equivalent to responding correctly to beliefs about reasons. Many other conditions are necessary for rationality. I listed a few in section 3. To be rational, you must not have contradictory beliefs, you must intend what you believe is necessary to an end that you intend, and so on. Responding correctly to beliefs about reasons is only one part of rationality. We have fallen far short of modified equivalence.

5. Meeting your own standards

In section 4 I insisted that many other conditions are necessary for rationality besides the enkratic condition. I earlier listed some in section 3. However, I have no basis for these conditions apart from intuition. I admitted that the formulation of some is only approximate. Moreover, there is a general reason to doubt conditions of this sort.

Take as an example the claim that, necessarily, if you are rational you do not have contradictory beliefs. A paraconsistent logician sees nothing wrong with having some pairs of contradictory beliefs, because she believes that some contradictions are true.⁸ If a paraconsistent logician believes p and believes not p , is she necessarily irrational? Plausibly not. Even if paraconsistent logic is false, we might not think it irrational to believe it. And if you do believe it, plausibly you are not irrational if you have patterns of belief that conform to it.

This suggests we might weaken the condition against contradictory beliefs. For example, we might make it:

Necessarily, if you are rational, you do not believe p and believe not p , unless you believe there are true contradictions.

I would be happy to accept some weakened formula such as this.

But the example of a paraconsistent logician may suggest a more radical alteration to what I have been saying. Conditions of rationality such as the ones I mentioned all impose strict liability in the sense I adopted in section 3. Each asserts that you are irrational if you fail to meet some condition, and this is so whatever your own beliefs are about the matter. It makes no difference whether or not you believe your reasons require you to meet the condition, or what you believe about the rationality of meeting it. In view of the example of paraconsistent logic, this sort of strict liability may seem too unforgiving. We might look for more liberal conditions of rationality.

As an alternative, we might think of rationality as meeting your own standards, so that you are irrational only if you fail by your own standards.⁹ The direct enkratic condition from section 4 offers a way to capture this thought. I repeat it here:

Direct enkratic condition. Necessarily, if you are rational then, if you believe your reasons require you to F , you F .

I explained in section 4 that this condition is not true universally, because it is inconsistent with the supervenience of rationality on the mind. But for this section only, I shall restrict the range of verb phrases that can be substituted for ' F ' to ones that describe being in a particular state of mind. For instance, F ing might be intending to go to Venice, or it might be not having contradictory beliefs. With this restriction, the condition is consistent with the supervenience of rationality on the mind.

One instance of the direct enkratic condition, restricted this way, is: necessarily, if you are rational, you do not have contradictory beliefs if you believe your reasons require you not to have contradictory beliefs. Another is: necessarily, if you are rational, you intend what you believe is necessary to an end that you intend, if you believe your reasons require you to intend what you believe is necessary to an end that you intend. And so on. The direct enkratic condition gives us a liberal version of each of the conditions of rationality that I have mentioned. It tells us that, to be rational you must satisfy each of these conditions, provided that you yourself believe your reasons require you to satisfy it. For another example, it gives us this liberal version of the enkratic condition: necessarily, if you are rational, you intend to do what you believe your reasons require you to do, if you believe your reasons require you to intend to do what you believe your reasons require you to do.

Once we notice this consequence of the direct enkratic condition, we might decide to give up all the separate conditions of rationality. We might replace them with the direct enkratic condition on its own, which gives us a liberal version of each.

If all the conditions of rationality could be replaced by just this one, it would allow us to say that rationality is equivalent to responding correctly to beliefs about reasons. The following chain of argument would get us to that conclusion.

First, we strengthen the direct enkratic condition by adding an explanatory or counterfactual condition (and a universal quantifier) to get:

Strengthened direct enkratic condition. Necessarily, if you are rational then, whenever you believe your reasons require you to F , you F and an appropriate explanatory or counterfactual connection holds between your belief that your reasons require you to F and your F ing.

Compare modified entailment from section 4. I repeat it here:

Modified entailment. Necessarily, if you are rational, you respond correctly to beliefs about reasons.

These two formulae are equivalent if we interpret ‘you respond correctly to beliefs about reasons’ to mean that, whenever you believe your reasons require you to F , you F and an appropriate explanatory or counterfactual connection holds between your belief that your reasons require you to F and your F ing. So the strengthened direct enkratic condition, like the strengthened enkratic condition, constitutes an interpretation of modified entailment. It says that rationality entails responding correctly to beliefs about reasons.

We can go further. We are pursuing the thought that the direct enkratic condition replaces all the separate conditions of rationality. If it does, that one condition encompasses the whole of rationality. Consequently, we could convert modified entailment from a one-way conditional statement to a biconditional. We would arrive at modified equivalence. We would have shown that rationality is equivalent to responding correctly to beliefs about reasons. This section’s particular interpretation of this idea is that rationality is equivalent to meeting your own standards.

I have two objections to this conclusion. The first is to the last step of the argument: modified entailment cannot be extended to modified equivalence as I have just suggested it can. The second is an objection to the direct enkratic condition, which means it is an objection to modified entailment itself, interpreted as the strengthened direct enkratic condition.

Objection to modified equivalence

For the moment, let us suppose the strengthened direct enkratic condition is true. I shall argue it cannot possibly be the only condition of rationality. So modified equivalence does not follow.

The direct enkratic condition is supposed to replace all the various more particular conditions of rationality that I mentioned. For instance, instead of the condition that you do not have contradictory beliefs, we have a particular instance of the direct enkratic condition: that you do not have contradictory beliefs if you believe your reasons require you not to have contradictory beliefs.

The particular conditions of rationality assert strict liability: you are not rational if you do not conform to them, whatever you believe about the conditions themselves. Replacing them with the direct enkratic condition removes strict liability. Whether or not you are rational depends on your own beliefs about conditions of rationality. Your rationality is judged by your own standards.

That is a nice liberal thought. But however liberal we wish to be, your rationality cannot be judged entirely by your own standards. The direct enkratic condition itself asserts strict liability. If you believe your reasons require you to F but you do not F , the direct enkratic condition asserts you are irrational. It asserts that this is so whether or not you believe the reasons require of you that, if you believe your reasons require you to F , you F .

So some strict liability is inevitable. Given that, we have no strong liberal motive to restrict it to the direct enkratic condition alone. And there is an obvious reason why we cannot replace all particular conditions of rationality by the direct enkratic condition. The following example illustrates it.

Compare two people. One believes her reasons require of her that, whenever she intends to F , she does not intend not to F . The other believes her reasons require of her that, whenever she intends to F , she also intends not to F . Suppose that the first has no contradictory intentions. But suppose the second has only contradictory intentions, by which I mean that each of her intentions is contradicted by another.

So far as the direct enkratic condition is concerned, both these people might be rational, since they meet their own standards. But they are certainly not on a par so far as rationality is concerned. The second cannot be entirely rational, since she has contradictory intentions. There must therefore be some condition of rationality that she fails to satisfy. She satisfies the direct enkratic condition, so there must be some other one.

Rationality cannot be equivalent to meeting your own standards, because some people's standards are more in accordance with rationality than other people's are.

Objection to the direct enkratic condition

For this section, I restricted the direct enkratic condition in a way that makes it consistent with the supervenience of rationality on the mind. But the following example shows that even the restricted version is false. Supervenience is not the only objection to the direct enkratic condition. Consequently, modified entailment, as I interpreted it in this section, is false.

Suppose you do not believe God exists, but you believe your reasons require you to believe he does exist. According to the direct enkratic condition, restricted to states of mind, you are irrational. But that is not necessarily so.

Suppose you believe there is no evidence of God's existence, and that is why you do not believe he exists. Indeed you are unable to believe he exists. Nothing you could do – going regularly to church, or taking a course of religious instruction, or anything else – would bring you to believe he exists. However, you believe your reasons require you to believe God exists, on grounds of personal safety. You believe it is a good idea to believe he exists, just in case he does. You may be perfectly rational in having these beliefs.

To be sure, your belief that you ought to believe God exists may be false. At least two arguments can be raised against it. One comes from evidentialism. Evidentialists think personal safety is no reason to believe God exists; only evidence can constitute a reason. So they think you are wrong to believe your reasons require you to believe God exists. Still, even if evidentialism is true, you need not be irrational in having a different opinion. Your belief that your reasons require you to believe God exists will be false, but it need not be irrational.

A second argument comes from the principle that ought implies can. Since you cannot believe God exists, perhaps it follows that it is not the case that your reasons require you to believe God exists. Still, even if it is true that ought implies can in this context, you need not be irrational in believing the opposite. Once again, even if your belief is false, it need not be irrational.

That shows the restricted version of the directed enkratic principle is false. On the other hand, what is its attraction? Why should we think you are necessarily irrational if you are not in a mental state that you believe your reasons require you to be in? You would indeed be irrational if your mental states were controlled by your intentions – if, necessarily, whenever you intended to be in a mental state, you were in it. The enkratic condition tells us you would necessarily be irrational if you did not intend to be in a mental state you believed your reasons required you to be in. Consequently, you would necessarily be irrational if you were not in it. But actually many of your mental states, including many of your intentional attitudes, are not controlled by your intentions.

We might be inclined to believe the direct enkratic condition even so. We might think a rational person simply has a psychological disposition to be in a mental state whenever she believes her reasons require her to be in it. Her disposition must be maintained by some causal process, but the process need not involve her intending to be in the mental state. It could be an automatic, subpersonal process.

But the example shows this is not credible. You believe there is no evidence for God's existence, but you believe your reasons require you to believe God exists. No automatic process will cause you to believe God exists. Indeed, an automatic process will probably cause you not to believe God exists. Any automatic process will follow your belief about evidence, rather than your belief about what your reasons require you to believe.

So we have to reject the direct enkratic condition, even restricted to mental states. There is no good reason to believe it, and the counterexample shows it is false.

Scanlon's condition

T. M. Scanlon's paper 'Structural irrationality'¹⁰ suggests an alternative condition that is not subject to this objection. Scanlon thinks that some of our attitudes are 'judgement-sensitive', as he puts it. Beliefs and intentions are, for instance. Judgement-sensitive attitudes he earlier defined as 'attitudes that an ideally rational person would come to have whenever that person judged there to be sufficient reason for them'.¹¹

The direct enkratic condition implies that a rational person has an attitude whenever she believes her reasons require her to have it. So at first Scanlon's view seems to be just an application of the direct enkratic condition. But it is not, because Scanlon intends 'sufficient reason' to refer only to reasons of a particular sort. He says:

We need to narrow the relevant reasons to what Parfit calls 'object-given' reasons: evidence for p , in the case of belief that p , and reasons for doing A , in the case of intention to do A .¹²

Parfit contrasts object-given reasons with state-given reasons.¹³ State-given reasons to be in a particular state are ones that have to do with the state itself. If it would be safest to believe God exists, that is a merit of the state of belief, so it is a state-given reason (if it is a reason at all) to believe God exists. Object-given reasons are ones that have to do with the state's object. Scanlon specifies what he takes to be object-given reasons for beliefs and intentions: for beliefs, evidence, and for intentions, reasons for doing the thing intended.

Scanlon's definition of a judgement-sensitive attitude amounts to this. When F ing is a judgement-sensitive attitude,

Scanlon's condition. Necessarily, if you are rational then, if you believe your object-given reasons require you to F , you F .

This is a variant on the direct enkratic condition. But the formula has to be interpreted carefully

if it is to catch Scanlon's meaning correctly. We must give a particular interpretation to the clause 'if you believe your object-given reasons require you to F '.

One way to satisfy the condition expressed in this clause would be to have a belief that you could express using a sentence of the form 'My object-given reasons require me to F '. But hardly anyone ever has that sort of a belief, because hardly anyone has the concept of an object-given reason. Another way to satisfy the condition is by having a belief that you could express using a sentence of the form ' X requires me to F ', where X (whether you know it or not) constitutes your object-given reasons. For instance, you satisfy the condition if you have a belief that you could express by the sentence 'The evidence requires me to believe the climate is changing'. A technical way of putting this is that 'believe' in the conditional clause sets up a referentially transparent context

We can make the transparency explicit when F ing is believing or intending. For believing and intending, Scanlon's condition comes down to:

Necessarily, if you are rational then, if you believe your evidence requires you to believe p , you believe p .

Necessarily, if you are rational then, if you believe your reasons require you to F , you intend to F .

The first of these formulae is plausible; I do not deny it. The second is simply the enkratic condition, which I accept.

So Scanlon's condition may well be true of beliefs and intentions. It makes better psychological sense than the direct enkratic condition. We can expect automatic, subpersonal processes to follow your beliefs about object-given reasons rather than your beliefs about state-given reasons. In my example, you believe it would be safest to believe God exists – a state-given reason to believe he exists. But you believe the evidence does not support God's existence – an object-given reason not to believe he exists. Automatic processes, following the evidence, are likely to stop you believing God exists. In general, automatic processes help to make beliefs judgement-sensitive in Scanlon's sense. The same is probably true for intentions.

It may be true for some other attitudes too. Scanlon's condition may be true of various attitudes. I have introduced it because it is a variant of the direct enkratic condition that, unlike the direct enkratic condition itself, is true in at least some applications. It is not subject to the objection I raised against that condition. We could substitute it for the direct enkratic condition in the argument of this section. If we did, the argument would show that, strengthened with an explanatory or counterfactual condition, Scanlon's condition is a version of modified entailment. So here is another interpretation of modified entailment that may well be true.

I am pursuing whatever truth resides in the idea that rationality consists in responding correctly to reasons. In section 4 I identified one piece of truth in it: the strengthened enkratic condition – one interpretation of modified entailment – is true. Scanlon's condition may add another bit of truth. Strengthened, it constitutes another interpretation of modified entailment. Unfortunately, the truth it can add is not much. Part of Scanlon's condition turns out to be the enkratic condition itself, whose truth we have already recognized.

Can this condition take us any further? Does it give any support to modified equivalence? It does not. It is not subject to my objection to the direct enkratic condition, but it offers no hope of overcoming my objection to modified equivalence. It cannot possibly replace all the other conditions of rationality, such as the ones listed in section 3.

6. Responding correctly to non-normative beliefs

The quick objection shows that rationality is not equivalent to responding correctly to reasons. It led us to consider instead the modified idea that rationality is equivalent to responding correctly to beliefs about reasons, or at least that it entails responding correctly to beliefs about reasons. The quick objection does not tell us just what the content of those beliefs must be. They might have a normative content; sections 4 and 5 considered that possibility. I concluded in section 4 that rationality does entail responding correctly to any belief whose content is that your reasons require you to *F*. That is the strengthened enkratic condition, which I accepted.

It is also possible that rationality entails responding correctly to some of your beliefs that have a non-normative content. Even some beliefs with a non-normative content may fairly be called beliefs about reasons. Suppose you believe there is a tiger-snake in the path ahead. Your belief has a non-normative content. But suppose that, if there was a tiger-snake on the path ahead, that fact would constitute a reason for you to stop. Then what you believe would, if true, be a reason for you to stop. So we may fairly call it a belief about a reason. It is a non-normative belief about a reason, or a non-normative belief in a reason. We may also fairly say you believe a reason exists, though you may not believe it is a reason.

You can respond to your belief by stopping. You may do so automatically: as soon as you acquire the belief that there is a tiger-snake in the path ahead, you automatically stop. In doing this, you may not form any normative belief, such as the belief that you have a reason to stop. You might not even have the concept of a reason. Yet you could still respond to your belief that there is a tiger-snake on the path ahead, by stopping.

Since you can respond to non-normative beliefs of this sort, we may ask whether rationality is equivalent to, or entails, responding correctly to them. Derek Parfit says:

We are rational insofar as we respond to reasons, or apparent reasons. We have some *apparent* reason when we have some belief whose truth would give us that reason.¹⁴

I think Parfit is saying that rationality is equivalent to responding correctly to what I have called non-normative beliefs about reasons. This section considers whether that is so.

Suppose you believe there is a tiger-snake on the path ahead, and you respond by stopping. Do you respond *correctly* to your belief? Probably not. If there is a tiger-snake on the path ahead, that is one reason for you to stop. But probably you have other reasons either to stop or not to stop. Perhaps you need to get back home, or perhaps you are enjoying the exercise. All these reasons together determine whether or not your reasons require you stop. There is therefore no such thing as responding correctly to just one of them. You can respond correctly only to all of them together; you do so by doing what all of them together require. Consequently, we could not count you as responding correctly to a non-normative belief in just one of the reasons.

Could you ever respond correctly to a non-normative belief about a reason? The tiger-snake does not provide an example, but are there any examples? Suppose you have a non-normative belief that a reason exists, and suppose that reason, if it did exist, would be enough on its own to make it the case that your reasons require you to *F*. I call a belief of this sort a 'perfect reason'. Then, if you *F* (and if an appropriate explanatory or counterfactual connection holds between your belief and your *F*ing), we could count you as responding correctly to your belief.

An example

Here is a plausible example of that sort. Suppose, gazing at the horizon at night, you believe you see a red light. What you believe is that you see a red light. Plausibly, if true, this would be a perfect reason to believe you see a coloured light. Therefore, if you respond to your belief that you see a red light by also believing you see a coloured light, plausibly you are responding

correctly.

Moreover, it is also plausible that, unless you respond correctly in this way, you are not rational. Necessarily, if you are rational you respond correctly to this reason. Rationality entails responding correctly to it. I do not assert this is true; only that it is plausible. I cannot think of any more convincing example. So for the sake of pursuing the argument further, I shall assume it is true.

If it is, it illustrates another sort of strict liability. You are irrational if you do not respond correctly to your non-normative belief about a reason, and this is so whatever your normative beliefs may be. Section 3 examined strict liability in responding to a reason. Here we have strict liability in responding to a belief about a reason.

This raises a question. The claim is that you are strictly liable for responding correctly to a non-normative belief of yours, whatever your normative beliefs may be. But might you not have a normative belief that imposes a conflicting liability? Is that a problem?

In the example, you have the non-normative belief that you see a red light. I said that, plausibly, you are not rational unless you believe you see a coloured light. But suppose you also have the normative belief that your reasons require you not to believe you see a coloured light. Perhaps you know you will be severely punished if you believe you see a coloured light. According to the direct enkratic condition, you are not rational if you believe you see a coloured light. So it seems you are not rational whether or not you believe you see a coloured light. Is that a problem?

It is not, because I have already rejected the direct enkratic condition in section 5. This may be a case like the one where you believe your reasons require you to believe in God. Suppose, given that you believe you see a red light, nothing you can do would stop you from believing you see a coloured light. Even if you believe your reasons require you not to believe that, there need be nothing irrational about you if you do believe you see a coloured light.

An alternative reaction to the difficulty would be say you must be irrational anyway, because your normative belief is irrational. If you can see a red light, you must be irrational in believing your reasons require you not to believe you see a coloured light. But that is not credible. To be sure, according to evidentialism your normative belief is false. According to evidentialism, your evidence provides all the reasons you can have for believing or not believing anything. In this case you have conclusive evidence that you see a coloured light, so you have a conclusive reason to believe you see a coloured light. The fact that you will be punished for doing so provides no reason against it. But whether or not evidentialism is true, it is debatable. We must not impugn a person's rationality just because she has a belief that conflicts with evidentialism.

In any case, in one way or another, we can accept strict liability for this example. Plausibly you can respond correctly to your non-normative belief about a reason, and you are not rational unless you do.

Practical reasons

The example of seeing a red light is contrived, and it is an example of a reason to believe. Can we find an example among practical reasons – reasons to do something?

Before I try out an example, I need to make an adjustment to the notion of responding correctly to a non-normative belief. Suppose you have a non-normative belief whose content would, if true, be a reason to do some act. Suppose the act is not a mental one. Then it could not be the case that, necessarily, if you are rational you do this act. That condition would violate the supervenience of rationality on the mind. You might fail to do the act because of some

obstruction outside your mind, which has nothing to do with your rationality. So if we insist that, to respond correctly to a non-normative belief in a reason to act, you must do that act, modified entailment will inevitably be false whenever the act is not a mental one.

I have already been through this argument in section 4. There it led me to adjust the notion of responding correctly to a normative belief; here I shall correspondingly adjust the notion of responding correctly to a non-normative belief. To respond correctly to a non-normative belief in a perfect reason to do something, you must *intend* to do that thing. You do not have to do it.

We are looking for an example of a non-normative belief in a practical reason such that rationality entails responding correctly to this reason. Derek Parfit offers one.¹⁵ Suppose you are due to have an operation next Tuesday. However, owing to a cancellation, you have the chance of changing your appointment to Wednesday. Anaesthetics will be available on Wednesday but not Tuesday. So if you change your appointment, you will have only slight pain on Wednesday, but if you do not change it, you will have agony on Tuesday.

To this non-normative fact, let us add others such as: the surgeon will be just as careful on either day; you have nothing else to do on Wednesday; Tuesday is equally as real as any other day of the week; if the calendar had been designed differently, a different day would have been Tuesday; and so on. Take the big conjunction of all these non-normative facts. I shall assume that enough facts are included to ensure that this conjunction constitutes a perfect reason for you to change your appointment to Wednesday. It makes it the case that your reasons require you to change your appointment.

Suppose you believe the big conjunction. What you believe would, if true, be a perfect reason for you to change your appointment. To respond correctly to this belief would be to intend to change your appointment. Furthermore, according to Parfit, provided we have included enough facts within the conjunction, you would necessarily be irrational if you had this belief and did not intend to change your appointment. So Parfit thinks this is an example of what we are looking for. You have a non-normative belief in a reason to do something, and necessarily, if you are rational and you have this belief, you intend to do this thing. That is to say, rationality entails that you respond correctly to your belief.

This is another assertion of strict liability. You are not rational if you fail to respond to your non-normative belief, whatever your own beliefs may be about the normative situation. This time I am not convinced.

Suppose you have a normative belief that conflicts with your non-normative one. Suppose you believe that your reasons require you not to change your appointment. That might be because you have some false, bizarre normative theory according to which you should avoid pain on Wednesdays much more than on Tuesdays. Then the enkratic condition entails that you are irrational unless you intend not to change your appointment. But Parfit thinks you are irrational unless you intend to change your appointment. We may take it for granted that you are irrational if you have both intentions; since they contradict each other, they violate *C2* among the conditions of rationality listed in section 3. So, whatever intentions you have, you are irrational.

What should we conclude? A similar problem came up with the red light example. But there the conflict between your normative and your non-normative belief was generated by the direct enkratic condition. I solved it by rejecting that condition. In our present practical example, the conflict is generated by the enkratic condition. The enkratic condition is on stronger ground, and I accept it.

We might instead claim you are irrational because of your bizarre normative theory. We might say it cannot be rational to hold such a bizarre theory. But I see no grounds for that claim. There

is no logical inconsistency among your beliefs; your belief that your reasons require you not to change your appointment is not logically inconsistent with your non-normative belief in the big conjunction. Moreover, your belief in a bizarre normative theory may be supported by all the evidence you have. Perhaps you acquired it during your upbringing by testimony from people you had good reason to believe were reliable. We are not entitled to impugn your rationality just because you hold a false and bizarre normative theory.

I conclude that you may rationally intend not to change your appointment, despite your non-normative belief whose content would, if true, be a perfect reason to change it. The content would, if true, make it the case that your reasons require you to change your appointment. But that is only because of the normative facts, and you do not believe those normative facts. Instead, you have a normative belief that implies your reasons require you not to change your appointment. You may not be irrational in having this belief. Consequently, you may intend not to change your appointment, and nevertheless be rational.

A parallel argument could be brought to bear on any non-normative belief in a practical reason. You may be rational even if you fail to respond correctly to it.

That need not be the end of the story. Derek Parfit has pointed out to me a way of going further. The problem revealed in the example is that your non-normative belief might conflict with a normative belief of yours. If you respond correctly to your normative belief, you will not respond correctly to your non-normative belief. That is why you may be rational even if you do not respond correctly to your non-normative belief. But suppose you have no contrary normative belief. Then you have no grounds for failing to respond correctly to your non-normative belief. In that case, we might conclude you are necessarily irrational if you do not respond correctly to it.

That may be correct for Parfit's particular example of pain on Tuesday. In this example, it is very obvious that what you believe, if true, would be a perfect reason for you to change your appointment. Given that, perhaps it takes a normative belief (which would have to be bizarre) to oppose its obviousness, and make it rational for you not to change it. I have no firm view about this example.

However, the rule does not generalize. The question is this. Suppose you have a non-normative belief in a reason. Suppose that what you believe, if true, would be a perfect reason for you to *F*. Suppose you have no opposing normative belief. Are you necessarily irrational if you do not respond correctly to your belief? That cannot be so in general. It need not be obvious that what you believe constitutes a perfect reason for you to *F*. It might be a perfect reason only because of some fact that you do not believe and to which you have no easy access. In that case, you may fail to *F* and yet be rational.¹⁶

For example, suppose you believe this liquid is orange juice. Suppose that, if it is indeed orange juice, that is a perfect reason for you not to drink it, because you have overnight become so allergic to orange juice that drinking it will kill you. But suppose nothing has given you any inkling of this allergy's sudden onset. Then you might drink the liquid and not be irrational in doing so.

Conclusion

This section has investigated the idea that rationality is equivalent to responding correctly to non-normative beliefs about reasons. These are the conclusions that have emerged.

First, to many of your non-normative beliefs about reasons, there is no such thing as responding correctly. You can respond correctly only if what you believe would, if true,

constitute a perfect reason. But many of your non-normative beliefs about reasons are about reasons that conflict with others. Your belief about a tiger-snake is an example.

Second, plausibly there are some non-normative beliefs about reasons such that, necessarily, if you are rational you respond correctly to them. Your belief about seeing a red object is an example. This means that, at a pinch, we may once again endorse modified entailment. I reproduce it here:

Modified entailment. Necessarily, if you are rational, you respond correctly to beliefs about reasons.

We can apply this idea to non-normative beliefs about reasons. But in doing so, we have to give it an etiolated interpretation. In my previous interpretations of this formula, I treated it as containing an implicit universal quantifier – as applying to *all* your beliefs about reasons. This time we have to treat it as containing an existential quantifier. It says that *some* of your non-normative beliefs about reasons are such that, necessarily, if you are rational, you respond correctly to them. Only of these beliefs can we say that rationality entails responding correctly to them.

Third, it is doubtful that *any* of your non-normative beliefs about practical reasons – reasons to act – are among the beliefs that satisfy this condition. The example of pain on Tuesdays turns out not to satisfy it.

Finally, besides modified entailment applied to non-normative beliefs, there are many other conditions of rationality. The enkratic condition is one; this is a condition on normative beliefs. Another is that, necessarily, you are not rational if you have contradictory intentions. Others are set out in section 3. So rationality is very far from equivalent to responding correctly to non-normative beliefs about reasons. Responding correctly to some of these beliefs may be a part of rationality, but it is very far from the whole of it.

7. Conclusion

In this paper I have investigated the idea that rationality is equivalent to responding correctly to reasons. I have followed the idea through many variations. I hope I have done enough to scotch it.

In sections 2 and 3 I rejected equivalence as it stands. In the following three sections I moved on to modified equivalence, the idea that rationality is equivalent to responding correctly to beliefs about reasons. I concluded there is some truth in one part of it: modified entailment, the idea that rationality entails responding correctly to beliefs about reasons. The strengthened enkratic condition constitutes one interpretation of modified entailment, and I accepted it as true. In sections 5 and 6 I found some truth in two other interpretations of modified entailment.

However, there are necessary conditions of rationality that are not captured by modified entailment under any interpretation. For example, to be rational you must not have contradictory intentions. So rationality is not equivalent to responding correctly to reasons, or to responding correctly to beliefs about reasons.

A fortiori, rationality does not consist in responding correctly to reasons, or in responding correctly to beliefs about reasons. Rationality must be an independent source of requirements in its own right.

Notes

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- 1 For instance, Niko Kolodny hopes to reduce rationality to responding correctly to believed reasons. See his 'Why be disposed to be coherent?'
- 2 Ralph Wedgwood argues this point convincingly in 'Internalism explained', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 65 (2002), pp. 349-69.
- 3 Thanks to Olav Gjelsvik for this point.
- 4 Thomas Nagel pointed out to me that believing p at one time might constitute a reason to believe p at a later time. The fact that you believe p one time constitutes, at a later time, indirect evidence of p : you would probably not have believed p if you had not had evidence for it. But in the claim I am objecting to, the beliefs are supposed to be contemporaneous.
- 5 A point made by Gilbert Harman in *Change in View*, MIT Press, 1986.
- 6 For instance, Tyler Burge in 'Reason and the first person', in *Knowing Our Own Minds*, edited by Crispin Wright, Barry C. Smith and Cynthia MacDonald, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 243–70. My own view is outlined in my 'The unity of reasoning?' forthcoming in *Spheres of Reason*, edited by Simon Robertson, John Skorupski and Jens Timmerman, Oxford University Press.
- 7 Thanks to Julia Markovits for pointing this out to me.
- 8 See 'Paraconsistent logic' by Graham Priest and Koji Tanaka, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- 9 This is the view of rationality presented by T. M. Scanlon in *What We Owe to Each Other*, Harvard University Press, 1998, pp. 18–32.
- 10 'Structural irrationality', in *Common Minds: Themes From the Philosophy of Philip Pettit*, edited by Robert Goodin, Frank Jackson, Michael Smith and Geoffrey Brennan, Oxford University Press, 2007.
- 11 *What We Owe to Each Other*, p. 20.
- 12 'Structural irrationality'.
- 13 'Rationality and reasons' in *Exploring Practical Philosophy: From Action to Values*, edited by Dan Egonsson, Jonas Josefsson, Björn Petersson and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen, Ashgate, 2001, pp. 19–39..
- 14 'Rationality and reasons', p. 25.
- 15 *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 124. Parfit further works out this example in 'Rationality and reasons'.
- 16 This point is made by Andrew Reisner in *Conflicts of Normativity*, Oxford University DPhil thesis, 2004, chapter 2.