

Are Reasons Like Shampoo?

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Abstract

This essay considers various constraints placed by philosophers on what they take to be a shared concept of a reason for action. I try to show that these constraints are incompatible with one another, proceeding to argue that we would therefore do better to embrace a conceptual pluralism. On such a pluralism, there is no such thing as *the* concept of a reason for action. Interminable debates about the nature of reasons for action arise precisely because no single thing called a 'reason for action' can perform all the varying functions that philosophers require of it. As with products such as three-in-one shampoos, each individual function is performed at the expense of others. Unlike such stuffs, however, some of the desired functions of reasons cannot be combined at all. I conclude that neither disjunctivist nor anti-disjunctivist accounts of reasons for action are capable of providing a unifying account of them.

Prologue

Interminable debates concerning the nature of reasons for action (RFAs) typically arise when philosophers, in the grip of specific pictures, enforce Procrustean uniformity onto their respective theories of what an RFA is. Accordingly, competing accounts will highlight features prevalent under one concept or conception of an RFA (a distinction I elaborate in §2 below) at the expense of those prevalent under other equally legitimate ones. For there is no such thing as *the* concept of an RFA—or so I shall try to show.

Four distinct pictures of an RFA have been particularly dominant in the literature, without exhausting it. One such outlook portrays RFAs as (i) *considerations* we act upon. Another views RFAs as (ii) *motivators* of our behaviour. A third conceives of them as (iii) providing *explanations* of occurrences of some kind, e.g. of the event or process of someone doing something. A final, teleological, picture takes reasons to be (iv) *ends* or goals. While not many philosophers identify (i) with (iv) (but see §3 below), they think that whatever the relation between them is, both (i) and (iv) can be further identified with (ii) and (iii). This conjunctive fact alone should raise our suspicions about how varying conceptions of RFAs are being grouped under a single concept. Conceptual analysts seeking to pin down *the* concept of an RFA tend to view two or more of (i-iv) as different aspects of one thing called a 'reason for action'.

Under the resulting pressure to provide an account of RFAs, which meet the constraints of all three pictures, theorists are forced to conceive of one or more of these in ways that are at best deeply awkward, on pain of abandoning them altogether.

We would do better to replace such 'shampoo accounts' with a conceptual pluralism according to which there is no coherent concept of a reason under which all three of these distinct features of reasons can be united. That is to say, there could be no single thing that performs the relevant triple function, or even some of the double-function combinations on offer. Reasons for action simply do not function like two-, three-, or four-in-one shampoos, capable of performing a number of traditionally distinct functions.

Conceptual pluralists should be purists about specific RFAs, employing different concepts of them for different purposes: normative, psychological, and socio-historical. An added bonus of doing so is that the question of whether RFAs are *causes* of action dissolves as a result of a conceptual pluralism that allows us to point to the socio-historical causes of human action without conflating these with either psychological phenomena or the considerations we act upon (see Sandis 2006). By contrast with the monist methods of conceptual analysis, which gave birth to such classics as Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* (1949) and H.L.A. Hart's *The Concept of Law* (1961), as well as to the metaphysical theories (which replaced linguistic observations with modal intuitions)

of later works such as David Chalmers' *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (1996) and Phillip Pettit's *A Theory of Freedom* (2001),¹ the methodology behind my pluralistic approach is best viewed as a kind of analytic deconstruction.

I. Concepts and Conceptions

It is quite natural to distinguish between concepts and conceptions, yet in recent years philosophers have by and large used the two terms interchangeably.² In his classic paper 'Essentially Contested Concepts', W.B. Gallie makes a throwaway comment distinguishing the concept of 'the way a game is to be played' from 'very different conceptions of how the game should be played' (Gallie 1956:176). His suggestion is that a group might share the concept of *the* right way to play a game despite its members disagreeing what this way consists in. The distinction was subsequently taken up by Hart (1961), Rawls (1971), Dworkin (1972), and Lukes (1974, *passim*). Hart considers the original *conception* of law as 'consisting of orders backed by threats' (1961:37, see also 45) and Rawls famously argues for fairness as a *conception* of justice (1971: Chs:1 & 3).³ Dworkin (1972: §II) makes a similar move in relation to fairness itself, maintaining that the different members of a group may all share the same concept of fairness, yet differ in their conceptions of what would qualify as fair in certain cases (e.g. in terms of how utilitarian they are).

Briefly put – and remaining as neutral as possible with regard to various competing conceptions of the ontology of concepts⁴ – two people may share the same concept of something to the extent that they agree on the relevant uses of the word(s) expressing it, and yet differ in their approaches to that which is being conceived. So understood, conceptions are ways of thinking of phenomena subsumed under concepts, the latter being expressible through (typically linguistic) behaviour. I am here largely in agreement with Peter Hacker, who takes the example of love:

Possession of a concept is mastery of the use of an expression. A concept is an abstraction from the use of an expression. We have relatively little difficulty and, for

the most part, little hesitation in translating l'amour, Liebe, amor, eros, and ahava (and their siblings and cousins) as 'love'. Whether the concepts expressed are the same or different depends upon the context of their use and on our fluid criteria for concept identity in this domain [...] There is no doubt that the ways in which thinkers, novelists, dramatists, and poets in different times or societies have conceived of love have been profoundly different. Some have thought of it as an ennobling emotion; others have conceived of it as a deplorable form of madness [...] Some have thought of it as a relationship between two human beings; others conceived it as perfected only when directed at a non-human object, such as God or the Idea of the Good. (Hacker 2018:268)

It is tempting to respond to Hacker's final suggestion by bringing up C.S. Lewis' distinction between four different *kinds* of love: Storge, Philia, Eros, and Agape. Surely these are not different ways of conceiving the same thing but, rather, four different concepts *of* love.

One might here object that to share a concept of *x* just *is* to not differ in our approaches to it. But this seems wrong to me. For one, the approaches we may differ in, need not be conceptual. We might, for example, agree that anger is an emotion with certain qualities, but disagree on whether it is ever good or justified. This disagreement doesn't concern the concept of anger: we are not disagreeing about what anger *is*. It is just that one of us conceives of it as sometimes being justified and the other one doesn't. Similarly, we may both agree in what a diet soft drink is, even though one conceives of such drinks as an innocuous part of a healthy diet, and the other as a nutritionally void symbol of capitalism gone wrong.

Alternative conceptions need not be evaluative. To the extent that any given thing has properties that form no part of the concept of it, we may disagree in our conceptions of the nature of such properties without disagreeing about the concept itself. Thus, we may both share the concept of water, but disagree about its precise chemical constituents (of course those philosophers

who think that being H₂O is part of the very *concept* of water do not share the same concept of water as those who deny it).⁵ Or again, different people may conceive of God in radically different ways in relation to questions concerning time, emotion, interventionism, prayer, and so on, while nevertheless sharing the concept of God as an omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and omnipresent being (for competing conceptions of omnipotence see Hart 1961:149). The Ancient Greek concept of *a* God, by contrast, is an altogether different one, though not completely unrelated.⁶ For any difference in conception, one can of course introduce a new technical concept to include it. I might, for example, explicitly state that I shall be using the term ‘God’ to just mean ‘a being that shares the four qualities mentioned above but is, by *definition*, interventionist’. Such conceptual stipulation has its benefits, but the more we engage in it the less we can expect that others to share our concepts and, *pari passu*, enter into meaningful exchanges with us.

Let me illustrate further by looking at different conceptions of reasons for action. Suppose we both share the concept of an RFA as (i) a consideration that one might act upon, irrespective of whether or not this is a good thing. We may nonetheless disagree about whether we should further conceive of such reasons as facts, states of affairs, propositions, or whatever else best fits our ontological scheme. Our dispute here is no longer conceptual but purely ontological⁷, though this is not to say that further conceptual explorations (e.g., ones related to facts, states of affairs etc.) might not shed light on our disagreement. Which of these conceptions we end up favouring will at least partly depend on whether or not we are conceptual monists about RFAs. Those who assume that there is such a thing as *the* concept of a reason are likely to further identify RFAs with one or more of the following:

- (i) Considerations we act upon
- (ii) *Motivators* of our behaviour
- (iii) *Explanantia* of our actions⁸

Accordingly, some conceive of RFAs as having the double or triple function of (a) serving as considerations that we might weigh in decision making, (b) motivating our behaviour, and/or (c) explaining why our actions occurred as and when they did. This leads to attempts to conceive of reasons as having the kind of ontology that would enable them to perform (a), (b), and/or (c), despite the fact that each of these functions is increasingly more causal than the preceding one. Alternatively, one might insist that the concept of a reason for action covers only one of the above. But how are we to settle which one? Intuitively (i-iii) all seem to central to what we take reasons for action to be. Ordinary language can only help us so much here. We ordinarily talk of reasons as considerations we act for, as things that motivate us (often invoking belief and desire talk), and as things that explain why we acted as we did. There is no doubt that i-iii are all associated with reasons for action in our everyday speech. The question we are trying to settle is whether there is one all-encompassing concept at play, or whether ordinary language allows us to switch between one and the other, with no explicit signalling.⁹

While what *in some sense* motivates an act can also explain it, and while the considerations we act for can *in some sense* be said to motivate us, these two senses are not the same. For example, I might be motivated by fear or jealousy but these are not considerations I act for, though the *fact* that I am afraid or jealous may act as I reason for me to seek help. In the sense in which my jealousy explains why I acted as I did, the explanation does not appeal to an agential reason for action, though the latter may be nested in the former (the same is true of character traits that aren't motives e.g. shyness).¹⁰ Similarly, a reason may rationalise an action without explaining it, and explain an action without rationalising it. In the former case we can render an action intelligible by offering reasons for which it could have been done, while falling short of explaining why it actually was. In the latter case we may explain an action by reference to the physical or psychological state of the person performing it (e.g. she was exhausted, confused, angry, exhilarated etc.), or to various features of the situation (e.g. it was dark, the handle was broken, time had run out), none of which necessarily rationalise the action when appealed to.

I have previously (Sandis 2013) argued that the considerations *for which* we act do not, strictly speaking, explain *why* we so acted. This has important ramifications for the explanation of historical action, for it is one thing to try and render intelligible the thoughts and actions of a past figure, and quite another to explain why past historical events (including events of people acting) took place as and when they did (see Sandis 2006, 2015b, and 2016).

Part of my aim of this current paper is to show that while this remains true in a sense, there may be other (equally legitimate) senses of 'explain' in which it would be unproblematic to think of considerations as explaining action (e.g. if by 'explanation' we simply mean any narrative, such as a myth or just-so story, that renders something intelligible).

A conceptual monist who has the consideration 'aspect' of RFA most clearly in sight, will quite naturally begin with an ontology best suited for such things and then attempt to stretch it to perform additional functions. Her philosophical task, then, is to place a 'consideration function' constraint on the motivating and explanatory 'aspects' of RFAs and only then proceed to explore how we might best conceive of considerations so that they might also perform additional functions. It is via such a process of reflective equilibrium, arguably, that Jonathan Dancy came to conceive of action explanation as non-factive, viz. to claim that something that is not the case may nonetheless motivate and thereby also explain one's actions (Dancy 2000).

By contrast, a conceptual monist, more focused on the 'motivator' aspect of RFA, will begin with a 'motivational function' constraint, as opposed to a consideration one. This initial conception of an RFA will thus be some kind of psychological state, and her philosophical task will be that of figuring out how a 'mental state' might also act as not only an *explanans* of action but also a consideration we act upon. It is through such reasoning that Michael Smith and Philip Pettit, for example, conceive of reasons for action as belief-desire pairs, which double as springs of action in light of their 'content', which serves as grounds (Smith & Pettit 1997). Or, again, one might begin with an 'explanatory function' constraint on RFAs and then try to figure out how something that explains the occurrence of an event (presumably causally rather than teleologically) can also double as a consideration we act upon and which might thereby be said to motivate us.

Having briefly distinguished between concepts and conceptions—and how these might play out for the conceptual monist working on RFAs—I now consider some specific arguments in more detail. If, as I shall be arguing,¹¹ none of them succeed in providing a unified concept of an RFA that meets all three constraints then this gives us *prima facie* strong reason to accept conceptual pluralism¹², thereby rejecting the promise of a shampoo account of RFAs. In what follows I confine myself to debates focusing on human action. The dogmas that already emerge here as a result of trying to make do with a one-size-fits-all conception of RFAs are bound to corrupt discussions of whether we can attribute RFAs to human animals and AI, but that is a topic for another paper.

II. Four-in-One Reasons

Consider the category of a reason for action that one may be said to *have*. These may come in a variety of forms: *pro tanto*, *prima facie*, all things considered, overall, instrumental, substantive, and so on. Philosophers have conceived of various kinds of reasons that fall under such categories as moral reasons (Dancy 1993), normative reasons (Dancy 1993, Raz 2009), exclusionary reasons (Raz 1990), justifying reasons (Raz 2009), good reasons (Smith and Pettit 2007), grounds (Wittgenstein 1953), grounding reasons (Bond 1983), practical reasons (McNaughton and Rawling 2004), con-reasons (Ruben 2009), enticing reasons (Dancy 2004), rationalising reasons (Davidson 1963), reasons the agent has (Davidson 1963, Williams 1981), reasons *why one should* act (Sandis 2012a, Skow 2016), reasons *for which one should* act (Sandis 2012a), content-related and attitude-related reasons (Piller 2016), fact-type reasons (Hornsby 2008), favouring considerations (Dancy 2000), and reasons from which one deliberates and/or acts (Hyman 2011).

Many philosophers take the above set to overlap with that of reasons *why* we act (Hornsby 2008:249, Skow 2016: Ch.6), which are in turn often defined as motivating reasons (Falk 1948 & 1963, Dancy 2000), explanatory reasons (Raz 2009), agential reasons (Davidson 1963, Hacker 2009, Sandis 2012a), teleological reasons - including purposes, aims, goals, and intentions (Sehon 1997, Bittner 2001, Schueler 2001, Skow 2016), considerations *upon* which one acted (Dancy 2000), facts

by which a person can be guided (Hyman 2011), reasons that render action intelligible (Dray 1957), belief-type reasons (Hornsby 2008), and rational causes (Marcus 2012).

According to many philosophers, there are important connections between the two sets of reasons, not least because it had better be possible to act for the sorts of reasons that fall under the first set (Dancy 2000). We might then think that the second set of reasons is a sub-set of the first i.e. that one can only act for a reason that one in some sense *has*. We famously find this view in Donald Davidson's seminal paper 'Action, Reasons, and Causes' (1963). Crucially, Davidson assumes that since it is possible to act for a reason that one has, the reasons we have *and* act for are indeed identical to the reasons *why* we act. He thus uses all of the following phrases interchangeably:

- (i) The agent's reason for doing what he did (3)
- (ii) The reason that explains the action (3)
- (iii) The reason why an agent did something (4)
- (iv) The agent's reasons in acting (11)

For Davidson, these are typically all *sub-sets* of both of the following two co-extensive sets:

- (v) The reason that rationalizes the action (3)
- (vi) The reason the agent had (11)

The only exceptions are cases of (v) or (vi) that are reasons the agent did not act upon. In all other cases, Davidson maintains, the reason also doubles as a cause of the action in question. In the first published response in print to Davidson's article, V.C. Chappell writes that what is 'chiefly disturbing about Davidson's paper is that its central concepts – action, reason, cause, explanation – have not been delineated with sufficient clarity and detail' (Chappell 1963:701). I have tried to

show, above, that this is certainly the case with 'reason'.

It is easy to forget that Davidson was largely unconcerned with the nature of reasons for action after his initial 1963 paper. While he spent half his academic life delineating the concepts of action, cause, and explanation, he felt no need to do this with reasons. Indeed, it is remarkable just how little Davidson engages with the notion of a reason for action throughout his remaining *Essays on Actions and Events*, with the brief exception of the clarificatory remarks in the opening pages of 'Intending' (Davidson 1978:83-87). Even his famous discussion of so-called deviant causal chains (1973:78-80) is primarily concerned with 'the causal conditions of intentional action' (80), not the concept of a reason, which he frequently conflates with that of a motive (e.g., Davidson 1976:264). It is part of his legacy that subsequent debates on the nature of 'reasons for action' took it for granted that there was no real distinction between (i-vi). Even Davidson's fiercest opponents, offering a radically different *ontology* of reasons, can only make sense of their opposition by assuming that all are agreed on the *concept* of a reason for action.¹³

Yet RFAs, on Davidson's conception, can explain and rationalise action. While Davidson himself doesn't talk of reasons *motivating*, his term 'primary reason' has effectively been replaced by 'motivating reason' with little comment. This is unsurprising given Davidson's abovementioned confluences of 'reason' with 'motive', coupled with his view that RFAs move us to action (a view that is, incidentally, endorsed by many anti-causalists, despite the fact that motivation is a causal notion).¹⁴ An early analogue of Davidson's confluences may be found in W.D. Falk, who not only uses 'reason' interchangeably with 'motive', but further states that reasons are mental antecedents to the actions they move, rationalise, cause, and provide a *telos* for: '

A reason or motive is a moving or impelling thought, the thought of that for the sake, or in view, of which, some act is done [...] no intelligible alternative to saying that it 'moves' or 'impels' in the sense that it functions as a cause of actions [...] a *causa rationis*, a mental antecedent which [...] will terminate in the action itself'. (Falk 1948: 25)¹

While Davidson does not mention teleology explicitly, he cites Ducasse's 1925 paper, 'Explanation, Mechanism, and Teleology', with approval (Davidson 1976:261), and there is no doubt that he takes all talk of teleology to be reducible to belief/pro attitude pairs (see Schon 2010). The philosophy of action has thus come to employ a shampoo model of RFAs, according to which they (i) motivate, (ii), rationalise, (iii) explain, and/or (iv) serve as the purpose of any given action. I have purposefully not included the word 'cause' in this list, despite the fact that it is Davidson's claim that RFAs are causes of action that has received the most attention, both positive and negative. The chief debate between Davidsonians and their opponents has thus centred on the extent and sense (if any), to which reasons can achieve these four things *causally*.

Davidson was responding to anti-causalists about RFAs who frequently appealed to Wittgenstein's distinction between (i) the reason(s) for an action and (ii) its cause(s), to be further distinguished from (iii) the agent's motive(s) (e.g. Wittgenstein 1953 §§475-485). But by (i) Wittgenstein had in mind the grounds or justification for a belief or action (*viz.* what we now call 'good' or 'normative' reasons¹⁵), to be contrasted with the causes of a happening or event. In themselves, these distinctions tell us nothing about whether to group the reasons for which we act may ever be identical to *any* sort of cause or motive, or whether they form some fourth, *sui generis*, group. Whatever the merits of his own position, Davidson was right to be skeptical about many of the arguments he encountered in popular 'small red books', including the 'logical connection argument' that the relation between actions and causes is empirical, whereas that between actions and reasons is logical (for what we should still salvage from these books see Sandis 2015b; cf. D'Oro & Sandis 2013b13ff.).

My question, by contrast, is the preliminary one of whether we can expect RFAs to achieve all (as opposed to any given one) of these things at *all*. If they cannot do this, then we need to open ourselves up to the possibility that RFAs might be causes in some of these respects and not others. This is not the thought that there is one kind of thing called a 'reason for action' that performs some of its functions causally and some non-causally. Rather, we should be pluralists about the

very sorts of things an RFA can be. We should abandon talk of *the* concept of a reason for action, replacing it with a conceptual pluralism that allows for different notions of RFAs that are closely tied-up, but without homologous resemblance.¹⁶ A reason why an action *occurred* must be a cause of sorts. To this extent, the explanation historical *events* is unavoidably causal, though it is a mistake to here downplay (as Hempel and Davidson do) the causal powers of humans. A reason one acts in the light of, by contrast, doesn't naturally double as a cause, though Anscombe (1957) was right to point out that 'we should often refuse to make any distinction at all between something's being a reason and, and it's being a cause' of a certain kind, for whether or not a cause is a reason (or vice versa) depends 'on what the action was or what the circumstances were (§15), but that it doesn't follow from this that a cause is a 'mental event' (§10).

III. Real and Apparent Reasons

In asking *why* someone did something, I may well be seeking to discover what her reason for acting was, in the sense of wanting to know the consideration or ground she acted upon. But, as already hinted at in § 1, it does not follow from this that grounds capable of rationalising action may thereby also function as reasons *why*. Bradford Skow (2016:142) argues persuasively that teleological answers to why questions report *reasons why*. Thus, 'Lou went to Pusateri's in order to buy turmeric' is equivalent to 'the reason why Lou went to Pusateri's was [in order] to buy turmeric'. But while it is perfectly natural to refer to Lou's purpose (*viz.* to buy turmeric) as her reason, the consideration she acts upon here is not an end or purpose but, rather, the purported fact that Pusateri's stocks turmeric *viz.* *what* she believes.¹⁷ If it turns out that Lou was wrong about this, then it would not make her trip any less purposeful. She will have gone to Pusateri's in vain, but not without an end goal or purpose. Indeed, her failure to find what she was after requires the presence of a *telos*. But what about Lou's reason *for* going there? How does it relate to reasons *why*?

'She went to Pusateri's because they stock turmeric' is equivalent to 'the reason why she went to Pusateri's was that they stock turmeric'. The meanings of 'because' and 'reason why' are

here ambiguous between reporting her reason for going, and reporting some unrelated reason why, as in 'the reason why she missed the lecture was that her alarm failed to work (cf. Sandis 2012b:50, Skow 2016:175). Either way, the equivalence only works, when Pusateri's does indeed have turmeric (see Stow 2016:174).¹⁸ So what of the case where Lou falsely believes that she will find turmeric at Pusateri's? According to Maria Alvarez (2010), on such occasions the agent acts for *no reason at all*.

When the reason why an agent acted is also a reason for which the agent acted, the explanation is what I have called a '*reason* explanation proper'.
When an agent acts for an apparent reason, the explanation that cites this apparent reason is a Humean explanation: he Φ -d because he believed that p. (Alvarez 2010:197)

According to Alvarez, 'Pusateri's stock turmeric' is only a reason for action if it is true that they stock it. Otherwise it is merely an apparent reason and an apparent reason is no reason at all (it is no more of a reason than an apparent duck is a duck). On such an account, the reason *why* the agent acted is identical with her reason *for* acting as she did when (and only when) her relevant beliefs are veridical. When they fail to capture the truth, they are neither a reason why *nor* a reason for. In such cases, the agent acts for no reason at all, though there is a reason *why* she acts (which cites the apparent reason). A similar view is defended by Clayton Littlejohn:

I agree that we can explain Leo's action by saying that he runs because he believes falsely that he is being chased. I agree that there are reasons why he acted as he did. I agree that when we see what these reasons are, we can see why Leo was perfectly reasonable in acting the way he did. What

I deny is that Leo acted for a reason. There was nothing in the light of which he did what he did. We all know why Leo ran – he ran down the hall because he believed that the killer was after him. This does not explain his action in terms of motivating reasons because it does not tell us what his reasons were – it turned out that he had none. (Littlejohn 2012: 155)

But it is misleading, at best, to claim that the person who so acts under a false belief does not act for a reason, viz. acts for no reason at all. Suppose Lou is *certain* that Pusateri's will have turmeric when in actual fact it is merely *likely* that they will have it today. All else being equal, there is a (good) reason for her to go there, namely that it is likely they stock the ingredient she needs. But this cannot be her actual reason for going if probability formed no part of her reasoning. We might then say that Lou failed to act for a good reason, even though there *was* a perfectly good reason for her to act as she did, and one that was not too far removed from her own reasoning at that.¹⁹ To infer from this that she is acting for no reason at all, however, is to falsely assume that all reasons we act for (viz. all agential reasons) are *good* reasons.²⁰

As Anscombe and Hursthouse have argued, people sometimes act intentionally for no (apparent) reason at all, such as when they perform their 'arational action' of throwing a plate in anger, or doodle during a lecture.²¹ But my scenario above doesn't look like a case in point. After all, Lou is acting with a clear goal and intention and can explain why she acted as she did by citing the purported fact that Pusateri's will have turmeric. To say that someone acted *for no reason* is to imply that their action had no rational motivation at all. This is simply not the case when we are motivated by false beliefs. The difference between the Anscombe/Hursthouse and Alvarez/Littlejohn cases is that in the former agents do not even act for an apparent reason. We may capture the difference between Hursthouse cases and Alvarez cases with the thought that in the former people are said to act for *no apparent reason* whereas in the latter they act for *some apparent reason*. Yet if Alvarez is right to think that an apparent reason is no reason at all, there would be no

real difference between the two kinds of case, for neither would be acting for an *actual* reason at all. Yet, unlike the arational agents, who act intentionally for no reason and with no purpose whatsoever, Lou's trip to Pusateri's is purposeful and based on reasoning from various considerations, one or more of which are in some important sense *her reason* for going to the store (see Sandis 2015a).

We know what it is to act for a reason that is not a normative reason (viz. a reason why one *ought* to act a certain way) but this is not to act for no reason of any kind at all. It is perhaps tempting to therefore say, instead, that Lou acts for a *real* 'motivating reason' that merely is an *apparent* normative reason. Whether this is right depends on what exactly is built into (and left out of) the technical notion of a 'motivating reason'. One highly misleading feature of the expression is that there is an important sense in which what motivates Lou here is the false *believing*, as opposed to the falsehood she believes. This may sound odd to the philosopher trained in reasonology, but it is standard psychology to talk of being motivated by drives, states, and perceptions. Moreover, while it is perfectly grammatical to talk of being motivated by facts, in everyday language this is relatively uncommon compared to talk of being motivated by one's thoughts, fears, desires, and beliefs, or indeed by motives such jealousy, greed, money, or love. Michael Smith (1987) is not making any kind of error, then, in claiming that the *believing* is what does the *motivating* in the veridical case too. The disjunctivist view of action explanations as being provided by (i) the agent's reasons *for* action when we get this right and (ii) Humean belief/desire pairs (that are merely reasons *why*) when we get them wrong thus fails.

The disjunctivist views of Alvarez and Littlejohn thus contrast with those of non-disjunctivists such as Michael Smith (1987), who claims that the agent's reason is always a psychological state, and Jonathan Dancy (2008), who claims that it is always a (purported) fact.²² Dancy himself notes that 'both are awkward in the sort of way that is usually due to a bad theory. As Aristotle said, they leave one saying things that nobody would say unless they were defending a theory' (Dancy 2008: 267). Quite; he might have added: in the grip of a picture.

On Smith's picture, false beliefs pose no problem, but we lose the sense in which an agent's reason is a *consideration* she acted upon since considerations are *things believed* and not our so-called 'motivational states' of believing them. Dancy's view, by contrast, retains the latter at the cost of having to claim that either (a) falsehoods can motivate and explain action, or (b) reasons for action do not motivate or explain action (see Davis 2003, Sandis 2012b & 2013). Dancy initially opted for (a) but has since abandoned this in favour of something closer to (b):

[T]he explanans is not identical with the reason for which the action was done [...] we can say that what explains the action is that it was done for the reason that *p*, without committing ourselves to saying that what explains the action is that *p*. It would remain true, however, that we explain an action by giving the reason for which it is done. All that we lose is the idea that the explanans is a proper part of the explanation as a whole [...] I said in *Practical Reality* that the explanans in a reasons-explanation does not have to be the case, and now I accept that this was wrong (Dancy 2014:90-91).

Dancy's u-turn reveals the benefits of abandoning the explanatory strand of a shampoo account of reasons, though he still wishes to hold on to the thought that 'the relevant explanations are non-factive, since they have a contained clause which does not have to be true if the whole is to be true (ibid:91). Nonetheless, we can now see the way out of several impasses. The mistake was to want to allow that one can act for a reason that is not a normative reason without having to deny that reasons can both motivate and explain action. All the claims in question can be fine *in themselves*, but not when accompanied by the firm persuasion that there is one thing called a 'motivating reason for action', which all these claims are about. Alvarez and Littlejohn are right to think that,

in the case of false belief, we can truthfully state that what *motivates* and explains the action is not the agent's reasons for doing it, but a reason *why* she acts as she does. Smith and Dancy are both right to think that these cases still involve an agent acting *for* a reason, but wrong to maintain that the reason in question can either motivate or explain action *in the relevant sense* if it is to also serve as a consideration that the agent acts upon. Only by abandoning the shampoo picture of reasons can we find a way out of what otherwise appears as an impasse.

The desire to hold on to some unified conception of a reason has led philosophers on different sides of these debates to all make a suspiciously similar kind of distinction: between the apparent and the real. Thus, Dancy distinguishes between *apparent* and *actual* facts or states of affairs (Dancy 2000:131ff.), Alvarez distinguishes between *apparent* and *proper* reasons (Alvarez 2010: 197ff.), and I have previously distinguished between *apparent* and *genuine* explanation (Sandis 2012a: 105ff.). The parallels between these moves suggest a common problem in need of a general treatment. While I presented my own distinction in the midst of trying to argue that we should not conflate the considerations we act upon with either explanatory or motivating reasons, my distinction nonetheless looks suspicious when placed alongside those of Dancy and Alvarez. It would have been better, I now think, to distinguish between different senses of explanation, motivation, and reason for action.²³

Epilogue

Eric Wiland concludes his book *Reasons* with the following claim:

Reasons for action *explain* and *count in favor* of the actions for which they are reasons, and they *belong* to and are *spontaneously known* by the person whose reasons they are [...] our various criteria of what counts as a reason seem to struggle against each other—that is, in trying to meet some of the constraints, we make it more difficult to meet the others. This curious

result suggests that we might not be able to fully understand the nature of reasons until we ourselves are fully reasonable [...] perhaps only the wise can do philosophy well. (Wiland 2012:169, emphasis in the original)

Wiland and I agree on the aporetic symptoms of theorising about RFAs, but not the cause. I am consequently less optimistic than Wiland about the prospects of full wisdom enabling us to fully understand how a reason for action can fulfil the functional ranges mentioned by Wiland and others. This is not because I claim to have reached full reasonableness and wisdom and it has failed to produce a consistent overarching account of reasons. My conviction that the various competing functions that philosophers have desired cannot be combined by any single thing called an RFA is, rather, the result of observing the various dogmas that emerge as the result of Procrustean attempts to meet all constraints imposed by shampoo accounts of RFAs. We might summarise the most prominent ones as follows:

- 1) **Non-Factivism:** The Explanation of action need not be factive.
- 2) **Agentialism:** Agential reasons are capable of explaining action.
- 3) **Apparentism:** We can act for apparent reasons that are *not* reasons.
- 4) **Psychologism:** All RFAs are psychological states.
- 5) **Anti-psychologism:** We are never motivated by features of our psychology.
- 6) **Disjunctivism:** Whether or not someone acted for a reason could depend on something as trivial as whether there was a remaining jar of turmeric in the store when she got there.
- 7) **Anti-disjunctivism:** There is a single explanatory schema in terms of which all actions are explained by RFAs.

If the main argument of the above essay is right, we have no reason to hold on to any of them, or others motivated by a similar concern. We should instead embrace a two-layered pluralism about both concepts and conceptions of RFAs. Such a pluralism facilitates the abandonment of the view

that reasons resemble shampoo, with one caveat: insofar as a function (e.g. shampooing) is weakened or distorted to the extent that it is combined with additional functions (e.g. conditioning and body-washing), we might think that RFAs are not so different from shampoo after all.²⁴

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¹ Despite its name, John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1975) is a transition work that falls between these two approaches. For evidence that it originally developed as a result of conceptual investigations and was only subsequently transformed (as the tide was changing against Wittgenstein) into something approaching a theory, see O'Neill (2014).

² Some exceptions are Ezcurdia (1988), Baker (2004), Lalumera (2014), and Hacker (2018:267-269). Only the last of these, however, uses the two terms to mark the precise distinction I am after. A comparison with the others would, alas, take us too far afield.

³ See also his Preface to revised edition (1999: xi-xvi).

⁴ E.g., whether they are mental representations, abilities, or Fregean senses (see Margolis and Lawrence 2014: §I).

⁵ In this, water is disanalogous to something like justice, for there is no question about what justice *is* that isn't conceptual (see Hanfling 2000:17ff.). *Prima facie*, reasons are more like justice than they are like water. And yet, I shall attempt to show that there remains an important sense in which two people can share the same concept of a reason but differ in the particulars of their conceptions. One explanation of how this is possible is that terms like 'motivating reason' are highly technical and can be defined in terms such as 'whatever it is that turns out to both motivate and rationalise action'.

⁶ See Wittgenstein (RPII § 139/Z 646). I leave aside here complications introduced by the Wittgensteinian notion of a family resemblance concept, save to say that this arguably does more damage than good in (i) supposing that it marks out a special sub-set of everyday concepts, and (ii) blurring the distinction between singularity and multiplicity of concepts of any one given thing (see Beardsmore 1992 and Sandis 2017).

⁷ While the distinction between conceptual and ontological disputes is a popular, there are good reasons for thinking that it is—in its most general form—spurious. Hanfling (op. cit.) gives the example of petrol. It is of course part of the very concept of petrol that it is a certain kind of liquid. But its precise chemical composition is a further, non-conceptual, question. In the case of petrol, this latter question is chemical as opposed to ontological. But there is no reason to suppose that certain kinds of ontological questions can't also be bracketed from conceptual ones in the case of technical notions.

⁸ This third requirement is further complicated by competing conceptions of what an action is.

⁹ Hornsby (2008: 247ff.) distinguishes between two different 'everyday conceptions' of reasons as (a) fact-based and (b) belief-based. These are not meant to be in competition with one another and so in some ways more closely resemble two distinct concepts (one could ask one's interlocutor whether they were

talking about f-based or b-based reasons; cf. Dancy 2008: 275). Indeed, Hornsby's b-based reasons are akin to my agential reasons, and her f-based ones to what I would call 'good grounds' (but see Hornsby 2008:249-250),

¹⁰ I defend these and other distinctions in greater detail in Sandis (2012a: Chs.1&2 & 2012b), where I further distinguish between different senses in which 'action' is taken to be the explanandum in question.

¹¹ For preliminaries see Sandis (2018 & nd.).

¹² One need not be a monist or pluralist about the concept(s) expressed by *all* terms, though one could find evidence suggesting that *most* terms are best captured by one rather than the other.

¹³ See essays in D'Oro & Sandis (2013a).

¹⁴ To be motivated by something is to be *moved* by it to perform some action, or refrain from doing so. Not everything that moves us so is what we would ordinarily call a 'motive', the latter being a specific kind of motivator linked to character traits. While there is a conceptual connection between seeing something as valuable and being motivated to act accordingly (see Sandis 2015b), we are often moved to act against our better judgement and can, equally, remain listless in spite of it. Although we can evaluate motives but not causes as being good and bad, all this entails is that it makes no sense to speak of a motive as being good or bad *qua* cause. One sort of pill may be better *at* causing drowsiness than another, but we don't thereby consider it to be a *better cause* of it. Likewise, greed may be a more efficient motivator of certain forms of behaviour than temperance.

¹⁵ But see Smith and Pettit (1997) for a proposed distinction between reasons that are normative and reasons that are (merely) good.

¹⁶ See note 6 above.

¹⁷ See Dancy (2000:Ch.6) and Sandis (2012:Ch.6). Skow (2016:162) talks of purposes as (non-factive) reasons that are additional to (factive) agential ones, but enumerating them thus would seem to imply that they can be weighed or added, which cannot be the case.

¹⁸ Things would be different if Lou's reasoning was epistemically cagier, e.g. 'Pusateri's *might* stock turmeric' or even 'they stock turmeric but it's possible that they have run out'. When modifying the example to discuss acting under false belief it is simplest to take the belief in question to be something like 'they will definitely have it' (see further below).

¹⁹ Comesaña and McGrath (2014) argue that there are certain cases in which one can have a normative reason that p, even when it is not the case that p. I remain neutral on this question here, save to say that it is misleading to talk of 'false reasons' in such cases, as if it is the reason *itself* that is true or false. The mistake is to think of 'that p' as the name of some actual or imaginary entity (see Sandis 2012a:115-119).

²⁰ Hornsby (2008:249-250) maintains further that an agent may *have* a reason to do something even when here is *actually no reason* for them to do it (cf. Dancy 2008:275).

²¹ See Hursthouse (1991); cf. Anscombe (1957 §§ 17ff.)

²² Dancy's anti-disjunctivism about RFAs leads to his trisjunctive account of *acting* for a reason (Dancy 2000:140), eventually paired down to a disjunctive one (Dancy 2008:268ff.). For complications that contrast a conception of reasons as premises or assumptions with that of reasons as facts see Hyman (2011).

²³ Things become even more complicated once we introduce different senses of the term 'action', which any given sense of RFAs may be better or worse suited to (see Sandis2012a and 2012b). On the conception of actions as events of our doing things, it would just be wrong to claim that there are reasons *for* action (Sandis 2012a:29; cf. Stout 1996 and Skow 2016:160).

²⁴ Earlier versions of this paper were delivered at the 'Reasons, Explanations, and Rational Accountability' workshop at the University of Fribourg (6-7th November, 2015) and the *Reasons, Rationality, & Rationalising Explanation* Workshop at the University of Warwick (29th April, 2016). Many thanks to all of the organisers and participants for their help, especially Maria Alvarez, Joe Cunningham, Magnus Frei, Ulrike Heuer, Frank Hoffman, Clayton Littlejohn, and Guy Longworth. Special thanks to Gunnar Schumann for incredibly helpful comments on an earlier draft.