

Guided by Reasons:

Some Comments on Joseph Raz's *From Normativity to Responsibility*

Ulrike Heuer*

1. The project

From Normativity to Responsibility explores normativity as an essential feature of our 'Being in the World': finding that normativity can be cashed out in terms of normative reasons (epistemic and practical) which are facts that are (marginal cases apart) independent of our beliefs about them; and yet those reasons are necessarily related to our rational capacities, and our proper functioning as persons who lead their lives by exercising their rational powers. The combination of those two claims seems at first blush surprising.

If reasons are independent of our beliefs, why would they be necessarily connected to our rational capacities? Our *beliefs* about reasons may be so connected: they are warranted only if they are the result of the proper functioning of our rational capacities, but why would the reasons themselves be? And the other way around: if you believe that reasons bear a necessary connection to our rational functioning, the odds are that you are an anti-realist about reasons.

The solution to the puzzle, broadly speaking, is that while Raz believes that reasons are facts—facts that are part of a case for the value of an action in the case of practical reasons, and facts that are part of the case for the truth of a belief in the case of epistemic reasons—standing in this relation to an action or a belief respectively is not enough for a fact to be a reason: it has to satisfy a further condition which is captured by the *normative/explanatory nexus*. Reasons must be capable of guiding us—but not every fact that would make acting in a certain way good could guide us. Raz offers *Meteorite* as an example: Rex lives in a neighbourhood that is struck by a meteorite just hours after he left. Everyone dies, except him. It was a good thing that he left, but he didn't leave for the reason that doing so would be escaping from otherwise certain death. He couldn't have, because the meteorite's movements are random and unpredictable. Thus the fact (or one of the facts) that made the action of leaving good, namely that it would save Rex's life, could not have guided him. He was just lucky.¹ Because it couldn't have guided him, says Raz, it is not a reason for leaving.

In developing the idea of the *nexus*, Raz initially (and again surprisingly) follows Williams. He approaches the nexus by adopting one of Williams's main claims: 'the point is that normative reasons must be capable of providing an explanation of an action: If that R is a reason to ϕ then it must be possible that people ϕ for the reason R and when they do, that explains (is part of an explanation of) their action' (2/20).

Raz then sets out to explore and develop this initial idea, to make it more precise, or—as the case may be—to defend the vagueness of the initial formulation of the nexus, as he points out time and time again that the concept of a reason is a concept of our ordinary thinking, and not a philosophical term of art, and we should therefore expect that its application will be indeterminate when it comes to cases that reach beyond our ordinary use.

*Senior Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, University of Leeds. I am grateful to all the participants of the Antwerp workshop in April 2011 for very helpful discussion. In particular, I would like to thank Niko Kolodny, Doug Lavin, George Pavlakos and Joseph Raz for their comments and suggestions.

¹ This is an example of an epistemic impossibility of the kind that Niko Kolodny criticises as 'distorting' in his contribution.

I will briefly sketch the path that leads to the initial formulation of the nexus, and then investigate some of its implications, and the reasons for adopting it. I will focus on two issues: (i) Since Raz follows Williams, in part quite closely, how does he avoid Williams's conclusions about reasons internalism? (ii) One way of understanding the nexus is that it suggests that 'reason' (but not 'value') is a response-dependent concept. I will explore this thought, and some of its implications, to elucidate the role of the nexus.

2. Towards the *nexus* via Williams

'Reason' can have different senses: it may mean 'explanatory reason' or 'normative reason'. Both kinds of reasons are facts. But they are distinct because neither can be reduced to the other. Some philosophers (most notably Broome)² have attempted to give an account of normative reasons in terms of explanatory ones, suggesting that normative reasons are explanatory reasons which explain a particular kind of fact. According to those philosophers all reasons are reasons in the same sense—they differ only in what they explain (2/9). Perhaps the specific object that normative reasons explain are normative relations. If so, by presupposing the existence of normative *relations*, Raz retorts, their explanation presupposes the existence of normative reasons in a different (non-explanatory) sense.

Normative reasons can explain beliefs and actions—but when they do, they explain *qua* normative reasons: normative reasons can guide agents, and in these cases, the reasons explain the agents' actions and beliefs. Yet they are not simply all the reasons that explain actions or beliefs. Both actions and beliefs can be explained by facts that are not normative reasons (the fact that the agent was under hypnosis etc). The kind of explanation that normative reasons provide is distinct: it is explaining an action or a belief through the agent's belief that the relevant fact obtains and that it is a normative reason for acting (or believing). Thus again normative reasons cannot be reduced to explanatory ones: it is the awareness of the normative reason *qua* normative reason (which is therefore presupposed by and independent of the explanation) that explains.

More precisely, and focusing on reasons for actions only, a person acts for a reason (and the reason explains her action) if the following four conditions are satisfied:

[Acting for a reason]

- (i) '[T]he belief must be belief in the fact that there is a reason, and include belief in its character as a reason.' (2/23)
- (ii) '[T]he belief itself must be explained by the existence of the reason, and it must be acquired or maintained in a rational way.' (*ibid*)
- (iii) '[T]he reason itself figures in the explanation of the action. Ultimately one is motivated by the fact that is the reason, through the mediating belief, recognizing it as such.' (*ibid*)
- (iv) '[T]he awareness of the reason ... must not only prompt, but guide the action.' (2/24)

This account of acting for a reason leads us towards the nexus: it is the function of normative reasons to guide us through awareness of the reason (cf (i)). Conditions (ii) and (iii) spell out how the reason itself—and not just the belief that there is a reason—is indispensable to this

² John Broome, 'Reasons' in R Jay Wallace, Philip Pettit, Samuel Scheffler and Michael Smith, *Reason and Value* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

kind of explanation.³ Reasons provide ‘standard explanations’ of beliefs and actions (2/19). Thus it must be possible that they should guide us. This then leads to the nexus: ‘**the point is that normative reasons must be capable of providing an explanation of an action: If that R is a reason to ϕ then it must be possible that people ϕ for the reason R and when they do, that explains (is part of an explanation of) their action**’ (2/20).

This formulation is very close to the one that lead Williams to his account of internal reasons.⁴ But it is also ambiguous:

‘It must be possible that people ϕ for the reason R’ could be understood as involving a generalised claim about ‘our’ abilities:

[General] It must be possible that someone ϕ s for R.

Or it might be a claim about the abilities the agent who has a reason must have:

[Individual] It must be possible for an agent A who has a reason R to ϕ that A ϕ s for R.

Since Raz claims that ‘the *nexus* is interpreted to apply to each individual agent and reason’ (2/29), I take it that he has [Individual] in mind (and presumably so does Williams).

Raz follows Williams in one more respect which the four conditions already incorporate: to act for a reason, an agent must be motivated by her *awareness* of a reason (and furthermore she must not only be aware of the reason, but also of the fact that it is a reason: she must recognise it for what it is).⁵

Raz’s conditions (i) and (ii) spell out Williams’s claim that to be motivated by a reason the agent has to believe that she has a reason, and she should acquire the belief because she ‘is considering the matter aright’.⁶ Thus, Raz accepts Williams’s conditions on acting for a normative reason, amplifying and elaborating them. Yet Williams thought that these

³ This runs into the well-known problem that false beliefs about reasons provide explanations of the very same kind. As Bernard Williams, ‘Internal and External Reasons’ in B Williams, *Moral Luck* (Cambridge University Press, 1981) 102, puts it: ‘The difference between false and true beliefs on the agent’s part cannot alter the form of the explanation which will be appropriate to his action.’ Interestingly, at this point Raz seems to part ways with Williams, claiming that an explanation of an action that includes the reason is a *better explanation*. The false belief that there is a reason is sufficient for explaining the action (as an intentional action) but truth makes a difference. The explanation that includes a reason is a better explanation because if the action is undertaken for a reason this will be relevant to its evaluation as acceptable or rational (2/25). In addition, reason-explanations ‘deepen’ the understanding of intentions, actions and beliefs.

⁴ Compare Williams’ formulation (*ibid*): ‘If there are reasons for actions, it must be that people sometimes act for those reasons, and if they do their reasons must figure in some correct explanation of their action ...’

⁵ For a discussion and criticism of this point see Douglas Lavin’s paper in this issue.

⁶ More precisely, Williams offers this description to explain what it would take to be motivated by an external reason. But if ‘acting for an external reason’ has to satisfy those conditions, it seems that ‘acting for an internal reason’ has to satisfy the very same conditions.

conditions could only be met by his own account of internal reasons, because acquiring a new belief that one has a reason to ϕ when this belief is not anchored in existing motives, but nonetheless rationally acquired is plainly impossible. As Williams sees it, the only way to satisfy Raz's conditions is by embarking on a 'sound deliberative route' from one's given motives to the conclusion that there is a reason. Doing so could perhaps satisfy all the conditions. Let me explain by focusing on (i) and (ii): the belief could be a belief that the fact that ϕ -ing will bring about some state of affairs, S, which satisfies one's desire for S is a reason for ϕ -ing (satisfying condition (i)); the fact that ϕ -ing does indeed bring about S, which satisfies the desire for S could explain the belief (satisfying condition (ii)).⁷ Understood in this way, the reasons for which we act would be internal reasons. And if the nexus holds, all reasons are reasons for which we can act. Therefore, if the nexus holds in addition to the four conditions and on the interpretation suggested by [Individual]—that is, if agents can respond to all their reasons—all reasons must be internal reasons.

But Raz does not defend reason internalism. Compare McDowell's response in support of externalism: McDowell, rejecting Williams's view,⁸ agrees with Williams about the possibility of satisfying the conditions on acting for a reason, and therefore feels compelled not so much to reject those conditions as to reject the nexus. He thinks that it is not true that we can recognise and respond to all our reasons—not, in some cases, without undergoing non-rational motivational changes first, thereby perhaps coming to 'consider matters aright' but only after one's motives and beliefs have changed.

Why is Raz not worried that his account of acting for a reason combined with the nexus might push him towards Williams's internalism? I take it that the answer has to do with his different understanding of our 'rational powers'. According to Williams, they comprise the powers of sound deliberation. Raz doesn't disagree: Deliberation (or reasoning) is at the core of our rational capacities but they extend beyond it. Reason is 'more than the power of reasoning, and includes at least the power to form intentions and decisions' (5/6).⁹ But this is not enough to reject Williams's conclusions. Even if Williams doesn't explicitly mention 'the power to form intentions and decisions' we can perhaps safely assume that he wouldn't feel compelled to reject it. Why then is Raz not a reasons internalist?¹⁰ Or is he?

According to Williams, a person has a reason to do what she believes she has a reason to do as the result of sound deliberation.¹¹ Raz isn't committed to any such view: he may agree that a person is *justified* in believing that she has a reason to do something, if it is the outcome of sound deliberation, but she may yet be mistaken. So while our rational powers allow us to recognise (and respond to) reasons, employing them without making rational mistakes is no

⁷ Whether internal reasons satisfy condition (iii) is a bit moot—because it is unclear, on the internalist's account, what exactly the reason is. Is it the fact that ϕ -ing brings about S, a state of affairs that one desires to obtain? If so, (iii) would be satisfied too. Or is the reason the desire/belief pair: the agent desires S, and believes that by ϕ -ing she'll bring about S? In that case, (iii) may not be satisfied. It would still be true, however, that the reason explains the action. Condition (iv) doesn't pose a particular problem for internalism.

⁸ John McDowell, 'Might there be External Reasons?' in JEJ Altham and Ross Harrison (eds), *World, Mind and Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) 68–85

⁹ Raz proposes the 'irrationality test' as a method of determining the extension of our rational powers: If the exercise of some capacity can be non-derivatively irrational, the capacity belongs with our rational powers.

¹⁰ It seems quite clear to me that reasons internalism is not the view that Raz wishes to defend. He never even discusses whether our reasons might be conditioned by our given motives. It seems obvious, at least to him, that this is not a consequence of the view he argues for.

¹¹ In addition Williams has a 'no false beliefs' condition. Thus when he says that a person has a reason to ϕ if there is a sound deliberative route to the conclusion that she has a reason to ϕ from her given motives, this includes that the process of deliberation involves no false beliefs.

guarantee for arriving at reasons. Making rational mistakes is only one way of failing to recognise one's reasons—there are others. Raz mentions forgetfulness and lack of concentration. Furthermore, Raz does not regard the starting points of reasoning as beyond rational scrutiny. We can question them, and they will be the starting points of sound reasoning only if they are warranted. But even warranted beliefs can be false, and therefore a belief about one's reasons, arrived at through sound deliberation, may be false as well. The falsity of the conclusion needn't call the soundness of the deliberation into question: we don't have reason to scrutinise our beliefs and attitudes *just because* there is a possibility of mistakes. Therefore the flawless exercise of our rational powers leaves room for mistakes.

But again: Williams doesn't disagree: After all, he claims in his famous gin/petrol example that the person who wishes to mix a gin-and-tonic, but mistakenly believes that the content of the bottle in front of him is gin, whereas in fact it is petrol, doesn't have a reason to drink the petrol/tonic mix—simply because the belief he starts from is false. (There isn't even an assumption that he could or should have known this.)

But Williams assumes (I think) that some of the starting points of reasoning are beyond rational control—in particular, basic motivational attitudes seem to be like this (those that are not based on further beliefs). The Owen Wingrave example illustrates the point: Owen's attitude to a military career could not be changed rationally, Williams seems to think. I take it that Raz would disagree. In addition the Humean elements of Williams's account—ie that sound deliberation has to start from some given *motives*—are not shared by Raz.

Thus, it seems to me that Raz's view does not lead to Williams's conclusion because of (i) the gap between justification and truth: justified beliefs that one has a reason and reasons can come apart—not only in gin/petrol cases, but also in cases that involve motives; because (ii) the starting points of deliberation typically aren't motives at all, (iii) and even when they are, those motives are not beyond rational scrutiny.

If so, the nexus wouldn't lead to reasons internalism. It does however establish one of the conclusions that Williams was particularly keen on: the difference between reasons and values. Reasons and values are different: some reasons aren't values (epistemic reasons and reasons for emotions are cases in point), and some values aren't reasons because there are (or can be) values that fail to satisfy the conditions that the nexus puts on reasons.

3. The nexus and response-dependence

However, there is a remaining puzzle: if the flawless exercise of our rational powers does not guarantee that we respond to reasons, why then is it that the ability to respond is a condition on reasons? Plausibly, all justified beliefs can be arrived at by exercising our rational powers. After all, a justified belief simply is the result of exercising one's rational powers without making mistakes. This seems true and trivial. But why believe that reasons (and not only justified beliefs) are subject to the nexus? How else would reasons guide us, you may ask? But that question is misleading: they could guide us to the degree that we can respond to them. Even if there would be some reasons that we cannot recognise as such or respond to, it would still be true that reasons can guide us as long as we can recognise and respond to some of them. Thus, Raz's account of acting for a reason may be correct, even if the nexus is not.

The formulation of the nexus may suggest that what it proposes is a response-dependent account of the concept of a reason¹² while denying that the facts which provide reasons—facts that are part of the case for the value of an action or the truth of a belief—can be accounted for in a similar fashion. Focusing on practical reasons again, the concept of value is

¹² Compare Niko Kolodny's comments in this issue.

response-independent: there can be values that we cannot recognise or respond to. Whether such a fact is a reason, however, depends on our ability to respond to it. I will explore this proposal for understanding the nexus further—but I am not suggesting that it is actually Raz's view.

Something along these lines is suggested by some of Raz's formulations of the nexus: Reasons '**are reasons because rational creatures can recognize and respond to them with the use of Reason**' (5/3). The 'because' invites a response-dependence account: the facts that are reasons and our capacities to recognise and respond to them seem to be made for each other. Furthermore, whether an evaluative fact is a reason depends on our abilities to respond to it: that is, our abilities to respond determine the extension of the concept of a reason. But the concept of value is not a response-dependent concept: 'Values, those whose existence does not depend on the culture of rational creatures, are values, and have instances whether or not there are persons able to perceive and respond to them as values' (5/27).

The concept of a reason is the crucial one for explaining how normative considerations guide us. A response-dependent account of reasons could perhaps show how the limits of our rational capacities are also the limits of our reasons without denying that there is a truth of the matter, and that we can get things wrong: our reasons needn't be what the flawless exercise of our rational capacities leads us to conclude that they are.¹³ The response-dependence view would allow us to say that it is true that certain facts are reasons, but (to put it in Ralph Wedgwood's terms) those facts are reasons 'at least partly in virtue of some relation to some type of subjective response to [them]'.¹⁴

Furthermore, by distinguishing between values and reasons in this regard, the account promises to explain an important feature of the values-reasons relation: it explains why it is not true that there always is a reason to do what would in some respect be good.

Are reasons then (but values not) response-dependent? More precisely: is the concept of a reason a response-dependent concept? What would such a claim entail?

First of all, response-dependent accounts of a concept don't offer an analysis of the concept. They don't aspire to being non-circular, but they draw out certain entailments of the concept, thereby elucidating it and determining its extension. Crispin Wright suggests a set of criteria for response-dependence:¹⁵

Take a 'provisional equation' of the form:

If subject S is in circumstances C, then: x is F if and only if S judges that x is F.

¹³ Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge University Press, 1992) presents response-dependence as the view that the extension of a concept is determined by our best opinion. But the view of best opinion that Wright relies on here does allow for individual mistakes. I don't think that he would have to object to Raz's claims (explained above) that not all individual mistakes are mistakes of rational functioning. Hence Wright's view can be reconciled with Raz's rejection that the flawless exercise of our rational capacities guarantees the truth of the resulting beliefs about reasons. If 'best opinion' is understood in more idealised sense, guaranteeing the truth of background beliefs etc, the two approaches may well be compatible. Richard Holton, 'Response-Dependence and Infallibility' (1992) 52(3) *Analysis* 180–4 argues that the claim that the extension of a response-dependent concept C is determined by our best opinion is true only if the response in question is 'judging x to be C' (and some further conditions obtain). But there is no reason to limit response-dependence to these particular cases.

¹⁴ Ralph Wedgwood, 'The Essence of Response-Dependence' (1997) 3 *European Review of Philosophy* 31–54 section 2.

¹⁵ Wright (n 13) 'Appendix: The Euthyphro Contrast', 108ff.

The question then is whether the response ('S judges ...') tracks the extension of the concept F or determines it. It determines it, Wright suggests, if the following conditions hold:

1. *A priori*. The equation must hold *a priori*.
2. *Substantive*. The circumstances C must be specified substantively—that is, the circumstances cannot be described as 'whatever-it-takes' for the response to determine the extension of the concept.
3. *Independent*. Whether the circumstances C obtain must be independent of the details of the extension of the concept F. / '[T]he relevant concepts are to be involved in the formulation of the C-conditions only in ways which allow the satisfaction of those conditions to be logically independent of the details of the extension of those concepts'.¹⁶

Take colour concepts:

[Yellow]

If a standard observer S is in circumstances C, then: X is yellow, iff X looks yellow to S.¹⁷

The equation is *a priori*, and even though it is circular we can specify the standard conditions substantively, and whether they obtain is independent of the extension of the colour concept.

Could there be a similar equation for 'reason' which is modelled on the nexus?

[Reason]

If P is a rational agent in circumstances C, then: F is a reason, R, for P to ϕ , if and only if P can recognise F as a reason and respond to F by ϕ -ing.

[I leave out the complication that the relevant response is responding to F by ϕ -ing, because P recognises that F is a reason to ϕ .]

The equation of [Reason] makes reference to a response. Does it hold *a priori*? I suppose that if it is true at all, it is true *a priori*—just in virtue of the meaning of the concept 'reason'. Yet the relation to the response is different from the response-dependence in [Yellow].

The main difference is that the right-hand side of the equation in [Reason] refers not to a response, but to *an ability* to respond. As a consequence, the reference to 'circumstances C' is otiose: the circumstances C in [Yellow] determine when the relevant response occurs. But

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 123.

¹⁷ In response to Mark Johnston's counterexample (the blushing chameleon; M Johnston, 'Dispositional Theories of Value' (1989) *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 63), Wright has modified the formulation to something like this: 'If the C-conditions hold, (x is red iff x is judged to be red).' This is actually Richard Holton's gloss on Wright's response in his 'Intentions, Response-Dependence and Immunity from Error' in Peter Menzies (ed), *Response Dependent Concepts*, ANU Working Papers in Philosophy 1, Canberra, 1991, 83–121; Wright's own is more complicated. I will ignore this wrinkle—hoping that it's not relevant here.

since the equation only states that the response could occur, [Reason] does not have the same form as [Yellow].

We could try to turn [Reason] into a more colour-like equation so that the right-hand side refers to a response (rather than the ability to respond), such as:

[Reason-rationally flawless]

If P is in circumstances C, ie P exercises her rational powers without making any mistakes, then: F is a reason, R, for P to ϕ , if and only if P recognises F as a reason and responds to F by ϕ -ing.

But this biconditional is simply false, because even if P didn't make any mistakes of reasoning (etc), she could still have false beliefs, and could make mistakes which are not mistakes of reasoning (or of exercising rational powers more generally—eg she can fail to remember some relevant information or fail to pay attention). But perhaps we could stick it all in?

[Reason-flawless₁]

If P is in circumstances C, ie P exercises her rational powers without making any mistakes, has no memory lapses, is fully attentive, possesses the relevant concepts, and has no false beliefs, then: F is a reason, R, for P to ϕ , if and only if P recognises F as a reason to ϕ and responds to F by ϕ -ing.

If this were the right equation, then the extension of the concept of a reason would ultimately depend on our best judgments (and therefore tally with Wright's understanding of response-dependence, at least in this regard), but they would still be independent of all our actual judgments (assuming that actual reasoners don't normally satisfy all the conditions in the specification of the circumstances).

But something seems wrong with this biconditional: whether a person would ϕ —however idealised the circumstances—seems quite irrelevant to the question whether she has a reason to do so. After all, she may have, all things considered, overwhelming reason not to ϕ —the reason to ϕ may be defeated; or there may be a conflict with other reasons that she has (even when the reasons do not defeat each other). Could we stick those considerations in too, adding that R is not defeated and P knows this etc? What we might get then is something like this:

[Reason-flawless₂]

If P is in circumstances C, ie P exercises her rational powers without making any mistakes, has no memory lapses, is fully attentive, possesses the relevant concepts, and has no false beliefs, and if there is a property F that she recognizes as a reason, and R is not defeated, and P knows this, then: F is a reason, R, for P to ϕ , if and only if P recognises F as a reason to ϕ and responds to F by ϕ -ing.

It seems clear that this flouts both the substantivity and the independence conditions. The description of the circumstances begins to look like 'whatever-it-takes', and they do not

obtain independently of details about the extension of the concept of a reason (or even of P's recognition of those details).

Could we avoid this problem by modifying not the description of the circumstances but the right-hand side of the conditional? Consider the following equation:

[Reason-flawless₃]

If P is in circumstances C, ie P exercises her rational powers without making any mistakes, has no memory lapses, is fully attentive, possesses the relevant concepts, and has no false beliefs, then: F is a reason, R, for P to ϕ , if and only if P recognises F as a reason to ϕ and responds to F appropriately (where disregarding F because as a reason for ϕ -ing F is defeated is one of the appropriate responses).

I doubt that this equation satisfies Wright's conditions. Remember that the idea of response-dependence is that the response determines the extension of the concept. In this equation it seems clear not only that the possession of the concept is a condition of the response (this would not be a problem since we weren't looking for a non-circular analysis), but the ability to apply it correctly is: to not respond when the reason is defeated. After all, F is a reason not because P ignores it, but because, even though P doesn't respond to it, she recognises that F is the reason which is, in the circumstances, defeated. It now begins to look as if the extension of the concept is not determined by the response, but determines it. And therefore the concept is not a response-dependent one.

It therefore seems to me that there is no real hope of gaining from the nexus an account of the concept of a reason in terms of actual responses (rather than the ability to respond), which would make it out as a response-dependent concept.

Perhaps the best we can do is to work with the original [Reason] formulation, rather than with any of those that specify an actual response—there only has to be a possible response, and therefore there can't be any reference to the circumstances under which the response occurs. What we get from the nexus is simply this:

[Reason according to nexus]

F is a reason, R, for a person P to ϕ , if and only if P can recognise F as a reason and respond to F by ϕ -ing.

Does this thwart the possibility of giving a response-dependent account of the concept of a reason? I think it does. We cannot, it seems, identify the truth conditions of the application of the concept with those for the possibility of responding to certain facts.

It seems safe to say that [Reason according to nexus] is not a textbook case of an analysis of a response-dependent concept. It bears some similarities to such concepts but there are also dissimilarities.

Starting with a dissimilarity: One difference between [Yellow] and [Reason according to nexus] is that we have some grip on reasons independently of the account: practical reasons are values; epistemic reasons are truth-related facts. (There is no similar way of specifying the colour-properties independently of the response.) And the nexus only provides a filter: it excludes some of those proto-reasons from being reasons. Therefore, perhaps the best interpretation of the nexus is not that it supports some 'provisional equations' but that it expresses a necessary condition that all reasons have to satisfy.

What counts in favour of the response-dependence approach, on the other hand, is that the ‘order of determination’ (as Wright calls it) is that our abilities to respond determine the extension of the concept of a reason, rather than the other way around. The ability to respond limits the extension of the concept—it doesn’t track it.

Perhaps this is how it should be: ‘reason’ is not a response-dependent concept after all, but it introduces a filter on certain facts. The filter matters to us because ‘reason’ is a concept with many links: it is after all on Raz’s view the currency in which all normative concepts deal. Thus we can explain ‘ought’ and ‘permissibility’ in terms of reasons. It also links to our practice of criticising one another and ourselves: If we fail to act for the reasons that we have, we are criticisable—unless there is an excuse: failure to act for a reason doesn’t by itself settle whether a person is criticisable, or to blame or liable to compensate, but it is our starting point for answering those questions. That’s why the concept of a reason, even if it is just a filter on other facts, is centrally important to us.

However, if response-dependence is not the right way to understand the concept of a reason, as Raz sees it, the question I started with is still begging for an answer: Why should we accept the nexus? Why think that a fact which we can’t recognise as a reason, or respond to, is not a reason? (Remember that the simple answer that reasons can’t guide us unless we can respond to them is not sufficient. They can still guide us to the degree that we can respond to them.) I am not sure what Raz’s answer to this question is.

Let me consider another point of comparison to response-dependent concepts. Response-dependence accounts face a certain challenge: if our responses were to change—eg if our eyesight changed in such a way that yellow things from now on looked blue to us—the property that the concept ascribes might also change: things would cease to be yellow. Blackburn urges that this is a particular problem for any response-dependence account of moral concepts, for surely ‘if everyone comes to think of it as permissible to maltreat animals, that does nothing at all to make it permissible: it just means that everyone has deteriorated’.¹⁸ An often proposed reply to this worry is to ‘rigidify’ the equation: It is our actual responses, not our possible responses, that determine the meaning of the concept.¹⁹ Perhaps this is a successful rejoinder for some of the response-dependent concepts (in particular the colour concepts). Were we all to become colour-blind, things wouldn’t lose their colour. But how about Raz’s nexus: is it subject to the same kind of worry? What if our abilities to recognise and respond to certain facts were to change? Would our reasons change as a result? If it would seem that the answer should be ‘no’ (as in the examples above), we could again suggest rigidification. But in this case, this isn’t a very convincing reply. Imagine a species of animals whose members can recognise certain facts as reasons, and respond to them, but not others, and on the whole fewer than we can currently recognise and respond to. If so, the right thing to say—in the spirit of the nexus—seems to me that they have certain reasons, but fewer than we have. (The individualised interpretation of the nexus makes this answer inevitable anyway.) Thus the concept of a reason would be relative to the actual abilities of the creature whose reasons they are. If the abilities change, the reasons change. But this kind of relativism seems benign, and may even be welcome—as opposed to the one that Blackburn describes: If A can’t recognise that cruelty is a reason against treating animals in a certain way, then A doesn’t have a reason not to be cruel. Assume that ‘A’ is Bonzo the cat—a renowned slayer of mice. Yet the action would not cease to be cruel as a result. And the other way around: if the abilities of some species change so that they now can recognise reasons as reasons, then they have reasons: reasons relate to the distinctive rational powers of the being whose reasons

¹⁸ Simon Blackburn, ‘Errors and the Phenomenology of Value’ in Ted Honderich (ed), *Morality and Objectivity: A Tribute to JL Mackie* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985) 14.

¹⁹ Martin Davies and Lloyd Humberstone, ‘Two Notions of Necessity’ (1980) 38 *Philosophical Studies* 1–30 22–25; David Wiggins, ‘A Sensible Subjectivism’ in D Wiggins, *Needs, Values and Truth* (Basil Blackwell, 1987) section 13.

they are. If we were to lose or gain rational powers, our reasons would change. Thus we may get some relativism of reasons, but since it is not coupled with relativism about values, this may be one of the attractions of the view.

A quibble:

In chapter 3, Raz discusses the so-called ‘wrong kind of reasons problem’ for reasons for attitudes.. Those are reasons like (eg) the reason to believe that there are no political problems in the Middle East because I pay you if you believe it, as well as the whole variety of demon-produced reasons. Raz calls these reasons non-standard reasons, claiming that their mark is that you cannot follow them directly: You can’t form a belief because I pay you if you do, and you can’t fear your cuddly toy because an evil demon is going to punish you if you don’t. Now if Raz is right that these are reasons to believe or to fear (or to form other attitudes) that can’t be followed, then it seems that the nexus fails: it is not true that those reasons could explain the forming of the relevant attitude for which they are, after all, reasons. Raz may reply that those reasons are also standard reasons (= reasons that can be followed directly) but for something else: for actions that bring it about that you have the attitude in question (say).

But this strikes me as a mistake. Granted, sometimes the best or the only thing you can do if you have a non-standard reason for having an attitude is to take action—so sometimes the non-standard reason for having an attitude may give rise to a derivative reason to perform an action. But at other times there is nothing at all that you can do about this (imagine that a demon requires you to love your much hated neighbour—and not even hypnosis could achieve that); or perhaps there isn’t anything that you *need* to do: perhaps you had always been scared of your cuddly toy, suspecting it of exerting a hostile and dangerous influence on all those who come in contact with it. In that case, you would be complying with your non-standard reason to fear the toy (not because the demon requires it, but because you fear it anyway). Nothing more needs to be done.

The general point is that a non-standard reason is a reason *for having an attitude*—not a reason to act in some way. If it gives rise to reasons for action, it does so only derivatively: the action is a means to complying with the reason for having the attitude. But then it remains the case that a non-standard reason for having an attitude is a reason that you cannot recognise and respond to—more precisely: you can recognise it, but you cannot respond to it. Hence despite what I said before in defence of the nexus, there is also reason to think that it doesn’t hold after all.